

An injury to one is an injury to all

Solidarity

& WORKERS' LIBERTY



Volume 3
No. 117
13 September
2007
30p/80p

Public Sector Pay:

UNITE

THE



Delegates to the TUC conference protest against Gordon Brown's pay squeeze.

Photo: Jess Hurd/www.reportdigital.co.uk

RANK AND FILE!

ON Tuesday 11 September the TUC Congress, the annual gathering of delegates from all Britain's unions, voted for united action by all the public sector unions to beat Gordon Brown's decree that public sector pay rises should be limited to two per cent at a time when the retail price index shows 3.8%.

Now the job is to make the union leaders deliver on that promise.

Local trade unionists in some cities, notably Leeds and Luton, have already started to do that. They have set up local joint committees of delegates from the different public sector unions — postal workers from CWU, local government and health workers from Unison, civil service workers from PCS, teachers from NUT, and others.

The TUC vote should be a signal to set up committees like that in every city. These committees can and should bring the word “solidarity” back into working-class discourse. They can and should put pressure on the union leaders, who have been prevaricating and postponing all year, to commit themselves to strikes to break Brown's pay-cut plan.

They can and should organise support for every group of workers in dispute, starting with the postal workers' new strikes due later this month. They can and should be centres of solidarity and resistance on many other issues besides pay, for example on the big cuts being forced through in the Health Service and in the civil service.

• More: see pages 4 and 5

The world as village gossip

BY MARTIN THOMAS

Will Kate McCann become another Lindy Chamberlain? The only reasonable answer is that we have no way of even making an intelligent guess.

But posing the question, and knowing that we can't even guess the answer, tell us some important things about the mass media which saturate our world.

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which has not yet developed "abstract", objective legal procedures.

It is, I think, of a piece with the way politics is covered by the mass media. The media give us very little information on the real political issues which we can and must make judgements about. They give us a flood of personal information — or "information" — about Blair, Brown, Cameron, and the rest, of the sort that might be relevant if we were choosing between them as village elder in a pre-political society.

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brains to conceptualise things most readily on the model of the medium scale — village or clan sized human communities, objects and processes not too big or too small or too fast or too slow to be readily seen, touched, smelt, or tasted.

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To understand society and politics in the proper terms — not as another soap opera, or episode of reality TV — also requires a scientific effort, too. It can be done. It has been done.

Yet there is constant counter-pressure from the mass media and the image-spinners of bourgeois politics. That counter-pressure gains ground in an era, like the present, where the mechanisms that allow for proper objective discussion among the working class of society and politics — lively, structured discussions within trade unions and working-class political parties, a lively working-class press which strives to educate — are shrivelled.

The primary job of socialists is to educate, and that includes educating ourselves to know when we do not know and cannot know.

National Service? No thanks!

BY AMINA SADDIQ

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David Cameron is advocating that all 16 year olds should take part in a six-week programme of charity work and physical activities after their GCSEs — whether they plan to stay at school or college or get a job afterwards. This will help people develop pride in themselves and in Britain, strengthen national identity, tackle anti-social behaviour blah blah blah...

Let's list the reasons why socialists should oppose this nonsense:

1. It will very likely become compulsory. When Cameron first floated the idea, at the start of 2006, he argued that the scheme would have to be "universal". This is the an attack on the rights of young people to do what we want. (And even if the scheme doesn't become actually compulsory, there will clearly be a lot of social and institutional pressure to buckle under and be a good citizen.) Why should the state be able to order us to go and do what capitalist politicians consider "good works"? Cameron, Brown etc are worried is how to crack down on "NIWOTs" (youth "not in work or training").

2. "Volunteers" will be used to as cheap labour for the state and voluntary organisations on projects which should be publicly funded and create decent, secure, well-paid jobs — boosting the

drive to privatise services by handing them over to the voluntary sector, and the drive to push unemployed youth into doing crappy jobs at half the cost (or, in this case, for free!) Witness Cameron's first pronouncement on the subject last year, in which he cited "helping with social services in Stepney" as something that people might do.

3. It is a substitute for, an excuse for not, providing the options that young people really do need: decent jobs, more and better benefits, housing, services and facilities, free and properly-funded education and so on. We want to live in a nice flat without paying too much rent; have a fulfilling, well-paid job; get real access to education; and be provided with the services we need to live and enjoy our lives — not be pushed into

a yet another scheme. As governments continue to hack public sector provision to bits, they will cite national service as proof that they really do care about young people's needs.

4. As you might expect from a throw back to the 1950s, it is an ideologically reactionary throw back to concepts of national identity, militaristic discipline and so on — concepts that bourgeois politicians are incredibly keen to promote, but we must be ready to oppose.

5. The Tories said it! Disgracefully, the National Union of Teachers has apparently signed up to help Cameron develop his plan. Socialists must get the labour movement to oppose it and fight for the real alternatives that young people need.

Swedish model will fail UK sex workers

BY HEATHER SHAW

THE government is considering proposals to prosecute men for buying sex; in this they are following the model of "vice control" used in Sweden.

Government statistics suggest that 85% of women in brothels are from outside the UK and whilst the people that bring these women into Britain are often prosecuted for trafficking, the men who pay for their services escape without charge. Eight years ago in Sweden legislation was passed so that the men who paid for sex would face criminal charges instead of the women selling it.

Other proposals being debated are the "naming and shaming" of men who buy sex through kercrawling, something which is already illegal in Britain.

But such reactions are not going to help the vulnerable women within the sex industry; in fact, they can actively endanger them. The *Guardian* on 10 September quoted Cari Mitchell, of the English Collection of Prostitutes, denying the theory that the Swedish model improves the conditions of women in the sex industry: "Criminalising clients forces prostitution further underground. Women have even less time to check out men fearful of arrest.

Instead, women are pushed into more isolated, less well-lit areas where they are more vulnerable to attack. Whatever anyone thinks about men paying for sex, safety should be the priority."

There are also reports of migrant sex workers in Sweden being arrested and simply deported. Alongside these concerns, the increased pressure on sex workers in terms of time per client and ability to be selective about clients decreases their agency in terms of negotiating safe sex and communicating about problematic clients. The measures increase the risks of sex work in these and many other areas. Safe, secure, legal and unionised environments are surely the only circumstances where sex workers can truly be safe and consider all these aspects of their work.

The criminalisation of clients is not a solution to the dangers of trafficking and prostitution and shouldn't be considered as the only alternative to prosecuting the women who sell sex. Cari Mitchell goes on to highlight what should be addressed in the debates surrounding this issue: "poverty, debt, rape and domestic violence, lack of housing, cuts in benefits, and low wages in other occupations which force women into prostitution and which the government itself found in its review of the prostitution laws".

Feminism's not dead!

Feminist Fightback 07 Saturday 20 October

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The RMT now campaigns outside the Labour Party. Other unions fail to make their campaigns inside the Labour Party more than "sounding off". Let's stop this passivity.

Brown's plan is a death blow

It's all very quiet. You won't have read a lot about it in the press, heard much about it on TV, or even been told much about it by your union, if you're a union member.

But at the Labour Party conference starting on 23 September, Gordon Brown plans to end 107 years of working-class political input through the Labour Party.

Not just to add "a further attack on Labour Party democracy" to the many made since Neil Kinnock's time. Not just to introduce "more of the same". Not just to add a further ailment to the already very sick state of working-class political representation in the Labour Party. This is a death blow.

We need an upfront, organised, rank and file campaign against it.

Brown's plan, bounced through the Labour Party's National Executive Committee on 24 June, just after he was officially declared Tony Blair's successor as Labour Party leader, would ban unions and local Labour Parties from putting motions on current political issues to Labour Party conference.

All votes on policy would take place in the almost-impermeable, behind-closed-doors National Policy Forum, and then be "ratified" by take-it-or-leave referendums of the Labour Party membership.

Unions would, fundamentally, lose all political say in the Labour Party other than the sort of "say" the US unions can get in the US Democratic Party, through horse-trading between union leaders and politicians on the lines of "give us a concession on this issue and we'll give you a few more millions for your campaign".

An official Labour Party consultation on Brown's plan ends on Friday 14 September. On Tuesday 18 September, Labour's Executive will meet and decide the final proposals, which will then be sprung on the delegates at Labour's

conference starting 23 September.

The word from insiders is that all the major unions oppose Brown's plan. If the union leaders stand firm on that, then the plan cannot go through. Even the dimmest or most timid union leader can see that the plan is directly aimed against their union having even the most plaintive voice in politics. And, despite everything, the unions still have nearly 50% of the vote at Labour's conference. Brown cannot change the rules without a conference vote.

Yet no union leader has campaigned against the plan publicly and loudly. None has gone out to inform and mobilise his or her union members against Brown's plan. All retain the freedom, with virtually no control from the rank and file, to swing behind Brown at the last minute, with the excuse that the plan has been modified in some detail or sugared by links to some concession.

No union, and none of the various Labour-left movements, has taken the initiative for an organised campaign on the issue, reaching out to the union branches and local Labour Parties.

Even at this late stage, and even if it has to be done from a small starting base, such an initiative is vital. This Labour Party conference will not be, and must not be, the end of the story.

If Brown dilutes his plan heavily, we will need a campaign to prevent him coming back with the rest of it (and to reverse that diluted plan: even a dilution could do great damage). If he pushes it through conference undiluted, then we must start a campaign to reverse the decision.

Brown must not be allowed to get away with it without a fight. We cannot tolerate the complacent response which would say: "Ah well, that just proves the Labour Party is finished. We thought it was pretty much gone anyway". If union organisations do not fight to defend their

existing political rights - or, more to the point, if socialists do not mobilise those union organisations to fight to defend those rights — then they will not, any time soon, magically leap out of that defeatism to make themselves the bearers of a new workers' party.

The fight for a new workers' party passes through the fight to defend, and use, the unions' existing political voice, not through the passive abandonment of it.

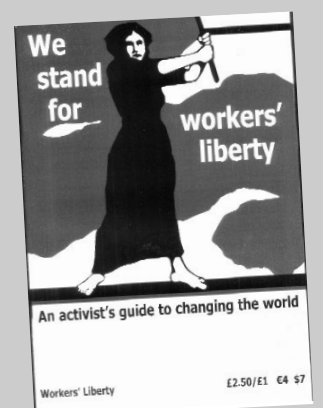
In the last few years it has become a regular thing for the unions to vote resolutions through Labour Party conference opposing Blair and Brown on key issues — the right to trade-union solidarity

action, the rebuilding rather than destruction of council housing, the defence rather than the privatisation of the Health Service. Equally regularly, the Labour Party leadership ignores the resolutions, and the union leaders make no complaint.

Brown, however, can see that this situation creates a permanent tension — a risk for him, a hope for us. Some day the unions' rank and file will gain the confidence to demand that democratic votes are respected, and put pressure on their leaders. To banish that risk, Brown wants to banish the democratic votes.

• Detailed briefing on Brown's plan: www.workersliberty.org/node/8934

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This pamphlet from Solidarity and Workers' Liberty sums up our ideas in compact form. A must-read if you're curious about our politics and activities, or just want to understand the debates on the left.

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RAIL

Metronet

BY A RMT MEMBER

A STRIKE by Tube workers, working for bankrupt infrastructure company Metronet was suspended early in September when talks between the company, the administrator and the union resumed.

The union say they are happy with the outcome of talks on pensions and other issues raised by the bankruptcy, but which way will the union go on privatisation?

Faced with two resolutions from the RMT London Transport Regional Council — one which demanded a ballot to bring Metronet immediately under TfL control and the other a demand for a campaign to lobby politicians and pursue guarantees over pensions etc — the RMT leadership opted for option two.

Of course option two stays within the law thus protecting the union [the properties, funds, full-time positions and salaries, not the living organism composed of our brothers and sisters you understand].

Secondly the self-appointed vanguards who compose much of the leadership are inherently distrustful of the working class. You see these gents [the exec and above are all men] are under the misapprehension that they are the only ones capable of considering political decisions such as re-nationalisation — ordinary workers they believe are only interested in bread-and-butter issues such as pensions, transfers and possible job cuts.

But Metronet workers want to work for a public company. They want the material benefits of doing so ie. a TfL pension and free travel for workers and their families.

Even members of the left who should know better argued for option two, claiming that once workers went on strike they would then automatically begin to fight for renationalisation. Some of us pointed out that this had not happened during previous privatisations when we fought under the cover of health and safety in the campaign against Tube privatisation and lost.

Far from becoming more militant workers were worn down by one- and two-day actions which did not raise the demand that we should strike to stay in the public sector.

Sometimes it is necessary to go through the process with workers to prove in practice that our ideas are correct but if we continually go at the pace of the slowest runner we will all finish last [particularly galling is that some of the slower ones actually belong to avowedly Marxist groups].

To bring Metronet back in house and to protect the East London line from privateering sharks we must act as an industrial union and break the anti-union laws. Our leaders have been campaigning against these laws for over 15 years and are only too well aware that they will be repealed only when they are actually broken on the ground.

The three items the RMT chose to fight over — pensions, job cuts and transfers — have seemingly been resolved as we guessed they would, and the privatisation juggernaut still rumbles on though perhaps with new drivers, as we said it would. The question is now that we've fought one we knew we would win, do we have the courage to fight one we may lose i.e fight for complete renationalisation?

To take on this fight we need to break the anti-union laws. Our movement has a history of opposing unjust laws, the Tolpuddle Martyrs being the most obvious example [without whom unions may not now exist]. As our elected leader is fond of saying, there is no guarantee of victory if you fight, but there's the certainty of defeat if you don't. Let's have the courage to fight and win.

Rally for trade union freedom
18 OCTOBER
COMMITTEE ROOM 14, HOUSE OF COMMONS, 5.30PM
CALLED IN SUPPORT OF THE TRADE UNION FREEDOM BILL

TUC: good words. Now for action!

BY JANINE BOOTH, RMT DELEGATE TO TUC CONFERENCE

THE big debate at TUC conference was on public services and public sector pay. The TUC had attempted to sedate us all in advance, with guest speeches from not just the CBI but also government ministers Jacqui Smith and Peter Hain — the latter telling us that the government, trade unions and employers had reached an “historic consensus” on pension reform, prompting me to heckle “I didn't!”.

The two main composites were 12, on public services, and 13, on public sector pay. There was never any doubt that they would pass unanimously, but the content and fire of the speeches would also give a clue as to union leaders' commitment to see the fight through.

Proposing Composite 13, PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka challenged Gordon Brown's argument that you need to restrain workers' pay to defeat inflation. He quoted Brown in saying that “The price of a job should never be substandard pay”, pointing out poverty pay levels among civil servants. Mark announced to great cheers that workers in the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had voted by 76% to reject their pay offer. He

might have mentioned (but didn't) the ironic fact that those workers' boss, John Hutton, would be given a big chunk of Congress time on the next day to tell us what a good bloke he is.

Just when I began to fear that Mark's speech would be all rumbustious fat-cat- and government-bashing, but nothing on how we would fight back, he set out the case for co-ordinated industrial action, civil servants alongside health workers, posties, teachers and others. 200 people had attended PCS's fringe meeting on the subject, and he called for the TUC to call a meeting to co-ordinate action immediately Congress finished. Good stuff.

Seconding, Christine Blower offered the solidarity of the NUT to other public sector unions. She stated that if in November, the teachers' pay review body failed to deliver decent pay rises, then the NUT would call industrial action co-ordinated with other unions. Christine did not explain why this had to wait until November — after all, how likely is it that the pay review body will go against government policy and give teachers the rise they deserve?!

A speaker from the Prison Officers' Association pointed out that Prison Service managers will be getting their pay rise in full, whilst the lowest-paid workers in the service -

ancillary staff — will have their rise staged, pegged to 10p per hour instead of 15p. “How will that 5p difference fuel inflation, while tax breaks to private equity won't?!” he asked. The POA also joined the call for co-ordinated industrial action.

A UCU speaker expressed gratitude to the PCS and POA for demonstrating that members can be won to a programme of strike action. However, I see more grounds for concern as to whether union leaders can be won to strike action, especially strike action of more than token days. Rank-and-file members will always be willing to fight, especially when given leadership they can be confident in.

And to me, that is now the issue. The Congress debate was welcome — a clear declaration of intent for co-ordinated industrial action to break Brown's public sector pay cuts. But the demand for co-ordinated action must not become an excuse for union leaders not to fight unless every other union is doing so too. And the action they co-ordinate must be more than isolated days out to show token protests rather than a strategy to win. Now we have the Congress policy, we need rank-and-file pressure to make the union leaders deliver.

• Janine Booth writes in a personal capacity.

FREEMANTLE

Not silenced!

THE Fremantle Trust, which holds the contracts for care homes in Barnet, North London, made enormous cuts to workers' wages and benefits of their workers in April. The dispute led to strike action in August, the sacking of Unison steward Andrew Rogers and a campaign to reinstate him.

Proposed cuts to the already low wages are up to 30%; threats are being made to axe sick pay, increase hours, reduce holidays, reduce payment for unsocial hours and cut pensions by up to a third.

So, Fremantle, not a big fan of workers then? Well, no indeed, but it would seem that they are not big fans of freedom of speech either.

The labour movement website labourstart.org took up the campaign and within a few days over 8000 messages of solidarity were sent to the Fremantle HQ. Fremantle did what all good “not for profit” employers do and threatened to sue Labourstart; they saw this as a challenge and stepped up the campaign. It was then that Fremantle, clutching at straws, delivered the same threat to Labourstart's Internet Service Provider if the campaign was not removed from the site.

The ISP issued an ultimatum — remove all mention of Fremantle by noon on Friday 7 September or the site would be closed. After intense talks with the ISP all traces of the campaign were reluctantly removed from the site.

Labourstart then found some new web space and published a new site dedicated to the campaign, in nine languages, hosted outside the UK and mockingly named “We Will Not Be Silenced”.

Something tells me that Fremantle might regret making such a fuss when they next check their inbox!

The new site can be found at www.wewillnotbesilenced.org with a link to the Barnet Unison blog. We urge you to join the thousands of others in sending messages of solidarity to the Freemantle workers.

UNISON

Karen Reissman

OVER 600 mental health workers in Manchester took three days of strike action in August to demand the rein-

statement of their Unison rep, Karen Reissman, who was suspended from her job in June. Managers of the Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust, which is in serious financial difficulties and last year tried to make large cuts in the service, claimed that she had “brought the Trust into disrepute” by speaking out against the cuts and organising strike action against them. The suspension came on the day she received a letter confirming her promotion to senior psychiatric nurse and forbade her to have any contact with her clients.

Despite offers from the union to organise emergency cover during the strike, the management bussed patients, many with serious psychiatric problems, out of Manchester to private hospitals, some as far away as Darlington. They are still there despite an estimated cost of up to £1,000 per person per night. This strike-breaking move was planned well in advance of the strikes.

A demonstration of several hundred supporters took place last Sunday and further action is planned.

This dispute is a major test of whether trade unionists can speak out against cuts and “reform” of the NHS without victimisation. Donations and messages of support to the Manchester Community and Mental Health Unison branch, 70 Manchester Road, Manchester, M21 9UN.

DISABLED WORKERS

Remploy

BY HEATHER SHAW

REMPLOY was set up over 60 years ago to provide work for people injured in the Second World War and now aims to provide “satisfying and rewarding jobs” for people with varying disabilities. It operates 10 businesses over 83 locations in the UK and employs 6,500 people. Most of these people are employed in Remploy's own factories making school furniture and specialist protective clothing for the police and military.

Remploy's new mission is to close these specialist factories and become little more than an employment agency that pays so-called mainstream employers to take on disabled workers, i.e. matching soulless jobs with people misfortunate enough to have fallen victim to a vicious job market. The proposed closure of 42 of the 83 sites and the redundancy of up to 2500 workers is the result.

Charities such as MIND and Mencap are supporting the closures saying that workers should be “given” jobs in mainstream industries. But Phil Davis, GMB National Secretary

insists that these jobs are hard to find and are often of low quality. The government wants Remploy to take on more people but without any more money, demonstrating a severe lack of dedication to people with disabilities and feigned attempts to integrate them in to mainstream society. This is yet another case of the holier-than-thou bosses and charities assuming that they know what is best for a group of individuals.

I say stop patronising workers and stand in solidarity with people with disabilities against these plans. Join the Remploy Crusade — passing through a town near you on their way through the UK on an awareness and fundraising tour. A full timetable can be found on the GMB website.

SCHOOLS

Wembley occupation

FOR six months, teachers in Brent and others opposed to the building of a second city academy in the borough, have been occupying the proposed site.

The land down the road from the stadium is owned by TfL, and currently houses playing fields, a private nursery and a motorcycle training school. The campaign, which has staved off the academy for three years, already scaring off at least one sponsor, has seen both the former Labour and the recent Lib Dem-Tory coalition councils try to push ahead — regardless of the formidable opposition from teachers and residents.

On Sunday 9 September from three tree houses overlooking the road, protesters — including one hanging from a harness between the tall trees — were hailed by passing cars and buses hooting in support, and were encouraged by residents stopping to sign the petition. It was a last stand for the moment since the current leaseholders were threatened by the council that they would have leases terminated early if they did not get rid of the camp. The campaign continues, and re-occupying is not ruled out.

While the campaign has been tenacious and persistent, a questionable strategy has been adopted: a NIMBY approach, focusing on potential traffic and noise, has allowed the Tories to opportunistically champion the campaign in a bid for votes. This may well pay-off in the short term, but the campaign also calls for a school to be built in the south of Brent rather than the north; if and when that happens, anti-academy campaigners may find themselves on the back-foot.

Postal workers to strike again

CWU postal workers will strike again this month (September) in their dispute with Royal Mail over pay and over the bosses' drive to transform the industry radically, with large job cuts, on free-market lines. The strike action follows talks which ended without agreement on Sunday 9 September. As we go to press strike dates have not yet been announced but are set to be before the end of September.

In the talks the union was offered a better deal on pay — a number of options amount to 6.7% on basic pay over two years with additional lump sums. This includes more money in the first year. However the pay was in return for a raft of strings on flexibility, pensions and

changes to duties, voluntary redundancy and industrial relations agreements.

CWU branch reps will meet on Thursday 13 September to discuss the outcome of the talks so far.

Pete Keenlyside from the postal executive of the CWU spoke to *Solidarity* about the current state of play.

"There are two possible assessments: either Royal Mail don't want an agreement and want to push on with their modernisation programme or they realise there is going to have to make an agreement and are putting everything on the table that they want in a final deal. I'm not sure which assessment is right but either way we will have to restart the industrial

action to get them to shift from here. All things being equal we will need to take industrial action. We now have to re-focus on what we want, we need to be clearer on what we want. The political element of the campaign needs to be there. The government still wants "modernisation" (i.e. cuts) in the Post Office.

"We can't tell what is going to happen with the other unions. The government may pick and chose who it deals with. It may do a deal with Unison and leave the PCS and us hanging out to dry. But I remain optimistic."

Trade union activists need to get ready for more solidarity work, including setting up postal worker support groups or local public sector solidarity committees.



Local government Strike call blocked?

BY MIKE FENWICK

AS we go to press, it looks like top Unison officials will head off the call by the union's local government negotiating committee (NJC) to ballot for strike action against the employers' 2.475% pay offer (a cut in real terms).

On 12 September the Unison Northern Region local government committee met, and was strong-armed into opposing the strike ballot. Unison local government Executive member Margaret Clayton claimed that other regions also opposed the strike ballot.

A 100-strong meeting on the same day of Tower Hamlets Unison voted unanimously for no delay with the strike ballot, but such rank-and-file voices are unlikely to be heard when the Unison local government Exec meets. It looks as if the Exec will insist on a "consultative ballot" of Unison local government members on the offer before considering any action.

The GMB has already taken the same line.

The local government employers had upped their pay offer somewhat. Their deal would give a 3.4% pay rise to the poorest paid council workers and 2.475% for all others. It's still a pay cut, though it is the first major public sector deal to break the 2% limit.

Because Brown has been saying there will be no exceptions to 2% — and for years to come, too — the employers have had to justify their offer by saying local government workers have increased efficiency over the last few years more quickly than other public sector workers. Is this a backdoor productivity deal?

In the health service a worse pay deal, stuck at less than 2%, is being offered.

Unison in health is currently balloting on that deal. The ballot closes on 13 September. The Unison leadership has gone as near as it dares to positively recommending the offer, say it is "the best that can be got through negotiations." Yet now would be the best time to co-ordinate action across the sectors, bringing the full weight of the union into play. A simple slogan of "one union, one fight" would pull together the member's common interest in securing a wage rise above the rate of inflation.

There have been a series of efforts by the full time officers in the health sector to silence a campaign to reject the offer in the ballot. When individual members and branches tried to organise for a no vote, the response was a rapid clampdown from the bureaucracy with threats of disciplinary action. The fact that Karen Jennings, Unison's head of health, is now to be a New Labour election candidate has further incensed rank and file activists. Rightly, members are asking if there is a conflict of interest between serving UNISON members' interests and serving Brown.

The rulings made to stop the no campaign are being challenged, and we await the results.

Not all the leadership are loyal minions of New Labour though. Others are genuinely cautious about the ability of the union to organise national industrial action in the NHS. Unison has never done this and sectional national action such as the NHS Logistics action has failed despite the tenacity of the workers involved.

This underlines the case for having an open debate in the union to discuss which forms of industrial action are both possible and would be effective. But the attempt to enforce silence has limited the opportunity for activists to start preparing members for the battles to come.

The RCN are meeting again on the 15th and at a special conference will be discussing taking action on pay, probably initially in the form of work to rule. The AMICUS section of UNITE have already decided to accept the deal, although action elsewhere could see that decision reversed.

Unity is a problem while the leadership tries to block local branch based initiatives, as in Leeds, to develop Public Sector Alliances. Unison General Secretary Dave Prentis has said that unity and joint action is the proper business only of himself and the other general secretaries, discouraging local initiatives with threatening letters. When it means blocking a forum for meeting others in the same union, only in different sectors, it seems even more ridiculous.

United action on pay, in health and in local government, would mean the birth of Unison as a true industrial union, for the first time taking on the role of coordinating campaigns and action across the public sector. That was the purpose for which it was formed and now is the chance to make it reality:

- one union, one struggle,
- no pay cuts across the public sector,
- for joint and coordinated strike action in Unison and beyond to end Brown's pay freeze.

New website for public sector pay battle

<http://www.unionsfightback.org.uk> collects news, background information, and downloadable bulletins about the public sector pay battle. Check it out! And contribute!

Learn from the prison officers!

BY COLIN FOSTER

WHAT is the government going to do with illegally striking prison officers? Send them all to jail?

The strike on 29 August by prison officers showed up the union leaders who have been dithering and "consulting" and making calculatedly vague threats of future action for months about Brown's imposed cut in real wages.

The strike was doubly illegal. The Tory government in 1994 made all strikes by prison officers illegal. And anyway, under the general Tory anti-union laws, continued by Blair and Brown, any strike is illegal unless the bosses are given seven days' notice.

The government quickly got a court injunction against the action, but also agreed to talks which it had earlier refused. The Prison Officers' Association says it may take further action if the talks are unsatisfactory.

The lawyer Marcel Berlins commented tellingly in the *Guardian* (3 September):

"The prison officers' disregard of the court injunction against them was short-lived and partly cosmetic, done for publicity rather than strategic purposes. It was clear that the strikers would return to work. Nevertheless the act of mass disobedience should not be seen as irrelevant."

The fact is that a high court judge ordered the cessation of a clearly unlawful industrial action, and thousands of the strikers, including their leaders, took no notice.

But what if the situation had been more serious? What would have happened had thousands of strikers defied the court indefinitely? In such circumstances, is an injunction toothless? The strike leaders could be fined or even imprisoned for contempt of court.

But such measures would only increase bitterness, make a settlement less likely and cause chaos in the prisons, possibly endanger-

ing public safety. The law would, in practice, be powerless".

What he writes applies to any moderately strategic group of workers, not just prison officers. Given working-class solidarity, the anti-union laws are "powerless".

The rank and file in every union should press that message on their leadership; and all trade unionists should support the right to strike for prison officers — and for police, who have been banned from striking or unionising since police strikes in 1918 and 1919 left the bourgeoisie in holy fear of Bolshevik revolution.

Prison officers are an anomalous group of workers. Socialists might not support their economic demands in the same automatic way as we do other workers. But we support their democratic rights.

And in this case the prison officers are fighting the same 2% pay limit that hits all public sector workers. They're doing it in conditions exacerbated by the policy, from successive Tory and Labour governments, of "dealing with" the social problems caused by an increasingly unequal and insecure society by stuffing prisons to overcapacity.

The *Guardian* of 30 August quotes a Leeds prison officer, Kirk Robinson: "When I started here we were locking up criminals. Now it's mostly people with a drug habit or psychiatric disorders. I'd guess 80%".

On official figures, 72% of prisoners have mental illnesses, 48% are illiterate, and only 30% have "basic skills" of literacy and numeracy. Stuffing them into prisons only worsens their social marginalisation.

Health service workers strung out by Blair and Brown's privatisation policies in the NHS, civil service workers afflicted by job cuts, and teachers suffering from the school-league-tables frenzy, would do best to follow the prison officers' example in refusing to be cowed.

PCS to "consult" yet again

IF looks could kill... If "consultations" could crush, then civil service workers would already have gained a levelling-up of pay to across-the-service decent rates, and stopped the Government's drastic job cuts.

After "consulting" its members at length over the summer about its barely-started campaign on jobs and pay, the civil service union PCS has announced that: "Feedback from the consultation meetings was that members clearly accept the need for further national action to resolve the dispute, alongside other unions if possible".

So the PCS will call action? Alongside the postal workers, due to strike again this month? Not so fast! First it will "consult" yet again. PCS announces:

"The union has a legal mandate for industrial action following the national statutory ballot in January... [but] the National Executive Committee has decided that members should be consulted again through a national indicative ballot".

PCS members in the Department of Work and Pensions (job centres and similar: one of the PCS's largest sections) have voted to reject their pay offer, but it is not yet clear what the union will do about it. The union's official announcement is:

"Members... working for the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) have overwhelmingly rejected a below inflation pay offer... 76% of those voting rejected the three year pay deal which sees cost of living increases for longer serving staff members of 2% this year, 0% next year and 1% in the final year". The vote was 26,935 to reject the deal, and 8,635 to accept, on a 43% turnout.

The repeated hesitation at the top means that there is something of a "wait and see" feeling in the rank and file. But the DWP vote suggests that the ranks of the PCS would mobilise in strength given a serious lead for a sustained fight on jobs and pay, not just scattered token actions.

Musharraf regime on the rocks

BY CATHY NUGENT

GENERAL Pervez Musharraf's eight year grip on political power in Pakistan looks increasingly precarious. His desperation showed in his response to the return from exile of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif this month. Sharif returned to challenge Musharraf and his cronies in elections due in November. He was deported hours after his plane touched down in Islamabad.

Musharraf's term as President is set to legally expire before the November elections, but Musharraf wants to extend his term — by some ruse or other. The current Parliament, which in which his supporters have a majority, may give him an extension. A new Parliament — if it is elected by free and fair elections — will go against Musharraf.

Why did Musharraf bother getting rid of Sharif? After all he could always ensure the elections are rigged so that his PML-Q party dominates again.

Musharraf (and his friends in the west) are probably anxious not to create another source of opposition to the Pakistani government. Sharif's presence in the country would have done that. The US seem desperate to keep



Pervez Musharraf

Musharraf in place, in some capacity. They say he is all that stands in the way of extreme Islamists getting their hands on Pakistan's nuclear weapons.

Right now Musharraf is under attack and threat from many sides. This is just the results and consequences of his record in power.

In July Musharraf ordered the capture of the hardline Red Mosque and its religious school in Islamabad. Over 100 people were killed. This has prompted a surge in suicide bombings and other attacks by Pakistan's various jihadist organisations.

After the storming of the Red Mosque the army deployed more troops to the North Waziristan region of the country, where pro-Taliban jihadists have been operating, in anticipation of further fighting. The army's increased presence prompted... further fighting.

Last March Musharraf suspended the country's chief justice. This sparked a countrywide protest by lawyers, civil society groups and opposition parties until the Supreme Court restored Justice Chaudhry. (The Supreme Court also sanctioned Sharif's return from Saudi Arabia where he had been exiled under a deal which saw a life imprisonment sentence quashed).

The background to the chief justice suspension was the General's attempt to find an illegal pretext on which to carry on as both presi-

dent and army chief. Sharif's deportation will almost certainly spark a similar protest.

Pakistani media can be very stropic. If Musharraf were to rig the elections, a huge media outcry would result.

Beyond the major parties there is a new grouping of populist and quasi-Islamist smaller parties called the APDM mounting street protests and court challenges.

Musharraf has few options. One of these is to share power with the Pakistani People's Party — a course that he has been pursuing ambivalently over the last year, conducting negotiations with the PPP's main leader, Benazir Bhutto, in her Dubai exile. Her publicists have been working full time to feed the media with stories of Bhutto as both a force to be reckoned with and a champion of democracy. That would be why she's prepared to do deals with the General.

And the deal is? The PPP would be prepared to give Musharraf some parliamentary exemption to his end of tenure, if he gives up his army post and reduces his presidential powers. The PPP is certainly a force to be reckoned with, but whether its popularity could survive the stink of such a deal is another matter.

WOZA defiant against threats

At four in the morning on 24 August, Zimbabwean police carried out a raid on the homes of Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA) members in Bulawayo, taking six women and a one year-old baby into custody. This came just a week after WOZA's "Sheroes" gathering, a conference held in secret in the face of Mugabe's police state, under the tagline "beaten, jailed but still determined to be free".

Smashing down gates and doors, the police seized the feminist activists from their homes and drove them to the bush around Khami Ruins, some 40 km outside Bulawayo, telling them that it was the last time they would be seen alive. Three were taken to a cliff top and told they would be thrown into the river below unless they informed on their comrades and passed on information about the WOZA organisation. Fortunately, as some tourists passed by the police became alarmed at a potential publicity disaster and released the women later that day.

But the Zimbabwean regime maintains a shameless campaign of repression against WOZA, and indeed the labour movement. The country's ever-deepening economic chaos, discontent among Mugabe's own party and a strike wave earlier this year have given the ageing tyrant reason to worry, leading to mass arrests of his opponents.

The week after the raid, 26 WOZA activists on trial in Gweru were finally removed off remand, some five months after being arrested for proclaiming WOZA's "people's charter". That was their fourth court appearance, the costs of which had forced some of the activists to sell their livestock, ruining their livelihoods. In Bulawayo four WOZA members are still going through the courts for their part in a housing demonstration last October.

In the face of Mugabe's repression, the need to solidarise with the labour movement and women's organisations struggling for democracy is clear.

Iranian government cracks down

BY JACK STAUNTON

THIS summer the Iranian regime carried out a fresh wave of torture and executions, keeping up its record of systematic human rights abuses, including killings of children, political dissidents, gay people and women. Some 50 people were killed by the Islamic Republic in August — a sharp increase even since 2006, when "only" 177 people were executed across the whole year.

Iran's tyrants have the ignominious honour of ranking as the world's second most prolific state killer, trailing only China in the number of executions. The regime's tally includes the hangings and stonings of those who have committed such "crimes" as "sodomy" and "apostasy". Each year the theocracy puts to death three times more people than even the United States of America.

The recent ramping-up in capital punishment has accompanied a government tightening-up, asserting its control over society with a crack-down on breaches of "Islamic law". The increasingly unpopular President Ahmedinejad and his administration not only mete out the death penalty to punish raped girls accused of "adultery" and boys who have gay sex, but as part of a campaign to maintain order in the face of a burgeoning workers' and women's movement which threatens the very basis of the theocratic order.

There are currently no fewer than 416 political dissidents in Iran's jail cells. Those whom the regime will allow to languish in prison, rather than killing them, are still subject to horrific human rights abuses. On 5 August, 11 leaders of the National Union of Unemployed and Dismissed Workers were condemned to 91 days in prison and ten lashes of the whip for their role in organising this year's May Day demonstrations.

In the face of this onslaught, activists have begun campaigns to denounce the regime. On 25 August, the International Committee against Executions published a letter from inside Iran's prisons, with 26 political prisoners and people on death row calling for worldwide demonstrations to bring international attention to the Islamic Republic's human rights abuses and to try and stop the executions from taking place. Clearly, this struggle against the death penalty in Iran must be a key part of the fight for basic

human freedoms and democracy in the face of the despotic regime and US sabre-rattling.

Iranian lesbian under deportation threat

An international campaign to defend Iranian asylum-seeker Pegah Emambakhsh from deportation has succeeded in delaying her return to Iran. Arrested in Sheffield on 13 August, Pegah was imprisoned in Yarlswood detention centre and was due to be expelled from the UK two weeks later — because she is a lesbian and because of her past life in Iran, she risked being put to death upon her return.

But a global campaign and the intervention of Sheffield Central MP Richard Caborn, succeeded in winning an eleventh-hour reprieve for Pegah. She is still detained at Yarlswood,

from where she sent a message to her supporters on 8 September

"I am having a difficult time right now, with no assurances for the future and with a lot of pain in my soul. I cannot deny that I am still very frightened, and the separation from my beloved children hurts so much that at times it seems unbearable. You don't know how much of a comfort it is to me to know that you are out there. You don't even know me, yet you are working for my cause, sticking your necks out and fighting for me, you write to me and send me wonderful flowers. I wasn't expecting anything like this."

Despite the campaign against deporting Pegah back to Iran, including an online petition signed by more than 10,000 people, her stay in the UK and her life are still in grave danger. Visit www.annesdoor.com for more information about the campaign.

Workers' Liberty pamphlets

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50p per issue unless otherwise stated, post free. £6 for all thirteen issues. Write to PO Box 823, London, SE15 4NA. Cheques payable to "AWL".

The US in Iraq: holding on until 2009

THE stated purpose of the USA's troop "surge" in Iraq which started early this year was to damp down the country's conflicts enough that the current US-friendly Iraqi government (or, maybe, a replacement one) could acquire political solidity and carry out some reconstruction.

Nothing less would do if the USA were to move towards its goal of extricating itself while leaving a more or less stable and more or less US-friendly government in place.

The "surge" has failed entirely in that purpose. US military commander David Petraeus claims that killings have slowed. Even if that claim is true — and probably it is not — it makes the "surge" a "success" only if you change the goalposts.

As oil industry expert Ben Lando puts it: "The Iraqi government is becoming weaker every day citizens experience long hours without electricity... fuel... healthcare, water, sewage and education systems. That, along with the violence, is spurring fighting between parties, even those allied by ethnicity or religion".

A poll commissioned by the BBC and published on 10 September gives the picture.

61% of Iraqis questioned thought that the "surge" had made security worse, not better. Only 11% thought it had improved things.

Back in 2005, 22% of Iraqis told pollsters that the Iraqi government was doing a "very good job", and 39% that it was doing a "a good job". Now only 5% loyally perceive "a very good job", and 28% "quite a good job"; 66% think the government is doing a bad job.

The numbers have got worse since the start of the "surge". 66% of Iraqis now "disapprove" of the way prime minister Nouri al-Maliki is governing. His government has more ministries vacant (through resignations) than filled.

56% of all Iraqis, and 82% in Baghdad, find the security situation "bad". 80% find job availability "bad". Electricity supply: 93% overall find it bad. Water: 75%.

The Americans might be relieved to find that the percentage of Iraqis considering them primarily to blame for the violence in Iraq has decreased from 40% to 27%, and the percentage blaming Al Qaeda or Iran has risen from 25% to 33%. But the US troops have not become less hated. 93% of Sunni Arabs, and 50% of Shias, consider military attacks on US forces to be "acceptable"; the percentage wanting the US troops to leave "immediately" (rather than "when security is restored", or "when the Iraqi government is stronger") has increased to nearly 50% for the first time. It is now 46%; was 35% before the surge, and 25% in 2005.

The US news agency McClatchy reports that Iraqi Interior Ministry figures show no downturn in killings: 984 at the start of the surge, in February; 1011 in August. A ministry official told the agency that the figures were much doctored, and the real figure was 2890 in August.

The USA's own Government Accountability Office (GAO) reports (1 September) that "the average number of daily attacks against civilians remained about the same over the last six months".

The USA, notoriously, keeps no count of the Iraqi civilians killed by its own attacks. In June the Associated Press reported that the US had dropped more bombs on Iraqi cities and towns in the first four and a half months of 2007 than in all of 2006, killing about 50 Iraqi civilians every month.

The flood of Iraqis fleeing mixed neighbourhoods to seek refuge from sectarian violence either in "their own" towns and neighbourhoods in Iraq, or abroad, continues. "The number of displaced persons is increasing at an average of 80,000 to 100,000 each month" (GAO).

The tighter division of Arab Iraq into Shia-only or Sunni-only neighbourhoods — now separated off, in Baghdad, by high concrete

walls and checkpoints — should tend to reduce the number of killings. It does not lay a basis for social reconstruction.

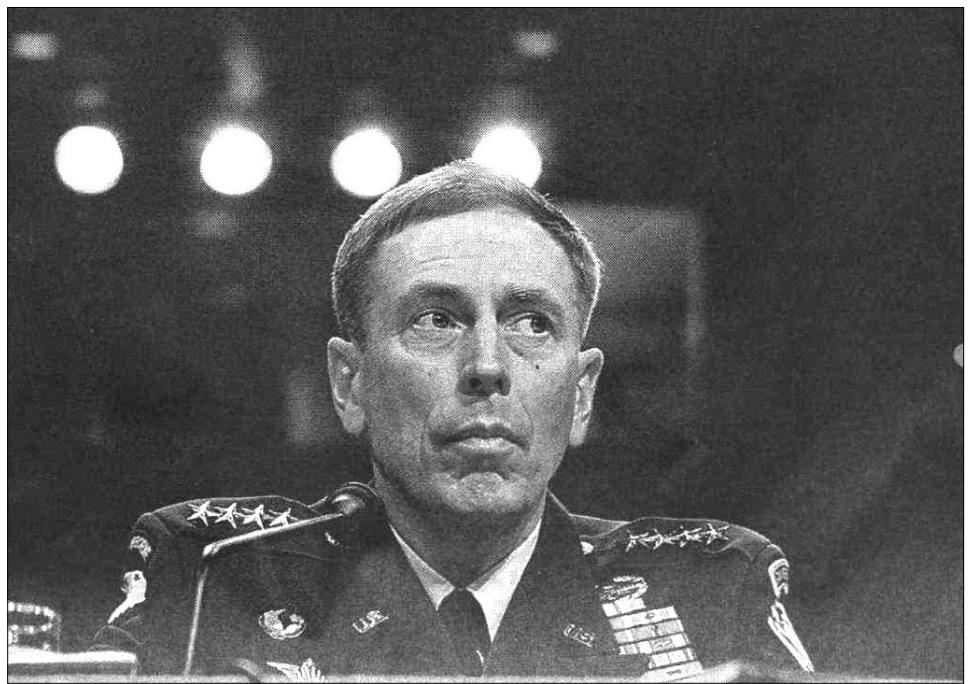
Iraq was, when oil revenues were flowing smoothly, a relatively rich country. Now, 28% of children are malnourished. According to the World Health Organisation, as of 11 September, 7000 people had been struck by cholera, and ten had died, in recent weeks — in the relatively quiet and prosperous Kurdish northern region of Iraq.

In short, the deterioration set in train after the Samarra mosque bombing of February 2006 — simmering sectarian civil war on the "top" of society, civil collapse "beneath" — continues. It has not been reversed.

In fact, the figures collated by the GAO show a trend of deterioration inexorable since the invasion in April 2003. There are occasional dips in the graph of chaos — notably in early 2005, after the first elections — but they are only temporary dips in a rigidly grim overall trend.

With the oil workers' strike in June, and the new united front of some unions to keep Iraqi oil in public hands and to defend union rights, the Iraqi labour movement — the only sizeable force in the country fighting to win democratic self-determination for Iraq on a secular basis — has reasserted itself a little. It remains heavily harassed and beleaguered. Support for it from the international labour movement is vital, and a duty.

The increasing "troops out now" sentiment in Iraq is testimony to the failure of the "surge". No wonder. This is an administration far more concerned to hand out contracts to US corporations and to strong-arm the Iraqi government into an oil privatisation law (and an electricity privatisation law just behind that) than to get clean water flowing and half-decent jobs available to Iraqi workers, let alone to help Iraqi unions gain basic democratic rights.



General David Petraeus

It is an administration which now seems to have no strategy but to bash on and hope it can keep things relatively under control until it hands over the mess to another US presidency in January 2009. There were signs earlier this year of attempts, presumably US-backed, by Iyad Allawi, the ex-Ba'thist thug who was interim (US-appointed) Iraqi prime minister in 2004, to oust Maliki through a new combination in the Iraqi parliament, then introduce a "soft" military dictatorship, but even that option seems to have failed.

Unfortunately all that does not mean that the available immediate alternatives have become better. The possibility that the al-Maliki government — unsavoury, but at least

elected after a fashion — might be able to survive after a US withdrawal is more remote than ever. The different militias are as murderously sectarian as ever. The new element of recent months is not any conciliation, but, on the contrary, increased gang warfare between rival Shia militias. As tensions sharpen in Baghdad, the idea that partition of the country following US withdrawal might provide some way out, imperfect but less bad than the current horrors, is also more and more unrealistic.

Solidarity with the Iraqi labour movement, against both the US/UK occupation and the sectarian militias, remains the only answer.

An opaque crisis

BY RHODRI EVANS

OVER the last several months, a crisis originating at the lower end of the US mortgage market has become, at least incipiently, a world credit crisis.

The immediate background to the credit crisis is a bubble, since about 2003, in low-security, high-interest mortgage lending in the USA. Corporations have made a buck by lending to house-buyers with poor credit records, at high rates of interest.

They allow for some defaults in payment. But when interest rates go up, and the house-price spiral slows or reverses, the defaults swell.

By the end of 2006, "subprime" mortgages comprised about \$1.5 trillion, of which \$600 billion originated in 2006 alone. By early 2007, 15% of all those mortgages were in foreclosure or sixty days or more in arrears of payment.

The crisis has spread, and is peculiarly opaque, because of the exotic developments in world financial markets in recent boom times.

The mortgage companies do not just hold on to the mortgages and wait for the regular payments to come in. They bundle them together into pieces of financial paper — certificates promising to pay such-and-such a percentage on their face value — and sell them on, to reap their profits faster.

When the bubble bursts, not only do the mortgage companies get into trouble, but also other financial outfits, holding some of the

certificates which have now become worthless.

In one knock-on effect, in the USA \$250 billion of credit in the form of "commercial paper" vanished in the last three weeks of August.

More and more exotic forms of credit mean no-one knows what's happening: the capitalists face, as the experts put it, "unmeasurable uncertainty rather than priceable risk". "A peculiar feature of this 21st century financial crisis is its opacity. Nobody knows where risk has ended up, which is why confidence and liquidity drained away in the first place" (John Plender, *Financial Times*, 29 August).

Contrary to some claims that since 1980s we have entered an unprecedented new era of capitalist stability, a recent survey of the history of financial crises finds: "The Recent Period... more crisis-prone than any other period except for the Interwar Years. In particular, it seems more crisis-prone than the Gold Standard Era, the last time that capital markets were globalised as they are now". (Franklin Allen and Douglas Gale, *An Introduction to Financial Crises*).

The Asian-centred financial crisis of 1997, and the dot.com bubble-bursting which started in March 2000, were both substantial crises, although they did not become full global slumps, and they affected Britain relatively little.

Not every financial crisis spills over into a crisis in production and trade, and I don't know whether this one will.

In the USA, for the first time since the 1930s, house prices are falling on a year-over-year basis.

The US car industry is already in recession; the whole manufacturing sector is sharply slowing down. Unemployment is rising, employment is falling, and consumer spending, as well as capitalist investment, will be hit by higher interest rates.

How far that slowdown will go, I don't know. Profit rates are still relatively high in the USA, which is a factor working against, but not guaranteeing against, serious recession.

For now, industrial and trade growth is keeping up, except in the USA. "Growth in the euro area and in Japan... around two and a half percent [per year]... China and India... close to or above double digit rates" (IMF survey, 23 August).

The ability of central banks to counter slowdown by cutting interest rates is limited, since inflation has been gradually pushed up as oil prices have risen from about \$20 a barrel in 2002 to \$70 today (in 2005 US dollars).

The US dollar has slid slowly on the international markets from index 108 in 2002 to index 90 today. The way this crisis could become really huge is if the slide in the dollar becomes a collapse, and Asian governments and capitalists stop buying American stocks and bonds, thus bringing the USA up hard against the basic imbalances represented in its long-term gargantuan trade deficit.

We can't change the world without the workers

BY ROBIN SIVAPALAN

AROUND two thousand activists mobilised for the 2007 Camp for Climate Action. It was held in a field near Heathrow airport in west London for a week in August. It was to highlight the pollution caused by air traffic.

The camp defied a high court injunction won by the airport's owners BAA. With its dozen related actions, the heavy handed policing and 71 arrests, it made global headline news.

It has been widely seen as the birth of a new movement to stop climate change. In its own terms, by getting itself noticed, it was an almost perfect success.

As a socialist activist participating at the camp I feel there is a lot to assess.

The idea for "climate camps" was initially discussed at an eco-camp set-up at Stirling during the 2005 G8 protests. Drax power station in north Yorkshire, the biggest carbon polluter in the UK, was the first target last year.

The camp model is about agitating and educating on climate change as well as promoting solutions by demonstrating "sustainable living". It is also about taking direct action against the corporate interests who are the main cause of climate change. All of this is geared towards building "the movement".

The organisers impose a model of non-hierarchical, consensus-based decision making with a focus on direct action. Despite the single model of organisation there are, officially, no leaders.

This year's camp was extremely impressive for a number of reasons. The vast majority of activists understood that the actions themselves were not the solution but were designed to both raise awareness and demonstrate the "ordinary" person's power to take power into their own hands to change and save the world.

The camp brought attention to the local community campaign against the addition of a third runway to what's already the largest international airport in the world. 1,200 homes, a primary school and potentially three villages are to be demolished.

The 2M lobby, an apparently powerful grouping of 12 local authorities lined up to oppose the third runway — covering 23 parliamentary constituencies, representing two million people who will be affected by the noise and pollution — can also thank the camp for getting it more coverage. Even the London Assembly's vote against a 6th terminal (and the 5th hasn't even opened!) and the third runway was little noticed until the climate camp came onto the scene.

Other camp actions drew attention to other "climate criminals" such as Shell and BP. Activists dressed as red herrings descended on scam "greenwash" carbon offsetting companies. Others protested at Carmel Agrexco (importing food from the Occupied Territories in Israel-Palestine), Farnborough and Biggin Hill private-jet airports, the Department for Transport and even Clive Soley's garden (former Labour MP now heading the expansion lobby). The week culminated in a blockade of BAA's offices with the workers sent home for 24 hours.

THE Climate Camp went down well locally, giving new confidence and resolve to beleaguered and bullied residents. Positive links were made in the run-up to the camp; there was co-operation and co-planning of actions throughout. This was a joy to see and hear about. Local socialist MP John McDonnell camped out one night.

Local workers — even (secretly) at least one BA worker — pitched their tents during the week of aptly freakish weather. Delegations from the camp visited the picket line of striking workers at the Japanese owned freight company, Nippon Express who, in turn, seemed generally supportive of the activists, if a little bemused. The local council also formally endorsed the camp.

The camp had its own strong sense of community, was organised around geographical neighbourhoods (or barrios if you like) to strengthen local networks of activists. Each



Climate camp protestors during the march

neighbourhood was a basic democratic unit. They would have a morning meeting over breakfast where issues arising from the camp would be discussed and "actions" were thrashed out and debated. Decisions made within the neighbourhood would be represented by "spokes" to cross-camp spokes-councils and vice versa. Spokes and facilitators were chosen anew each day.

Consensus methods often worked well, but on a larger scale were tedious, dwindling the numbers involved seriously and working against democracy.

As a means of initially involving people and boosting people's confidence, it is a great process. It's a bit like "get-to-know-you" games used in team building — essential to build trust among activists who need to rely on each other especially if facing police violence. But to make a fetish of it and abjure at all times simple votes is not good. Either the consensus is an illusion and people operate under peer pressure, or chaos ensues. Some people would do one thing and other people different autonomous things... I did despair at times.

Each neighbourhood ran a vegan kitchen with volunteers from the neighbourhood and had an eating and social area under its own marquee beside which people camped. Each neighbourhood provided volunteers to see to the central compostable toilets, to do watch duties and other tasks that came up.

There was a central kitchen and store, a legal support tent, media tent, welcome tent, well-being tent, a bike borrowing deposit, and a general camp office. The huge main marquee hosted whole camp meetings and could be divided up for the workshops that filled the day. As a logistical operation it was impressive.

Workshops allowed people insight into how it was all put together; there was an emphasis on skill-sharing and education to equip people to take on organisational roles in the future.

NATURALLY enough activists had greatly differing degrees of political coherence. There were anarchists of varying descriptions and groupings, generic bland peace and environmental activists, life-long hippies, NGO types as well as Marxist socialists (in small number).

Predominant was the "localist outlook" — people who believe in seeking local solutions to energy and food production. In my view that is indicative of a complete failure — or wanton refusal — to get to grips with the reality of global capitalism, capitalist governments and state machinery.

The fact that 75% of energy is lost before it reaches its destination does point to a radical reduction in reliance on trans-global food transportation and oil-intensive agriculture.

But it is deluded and futile to believe that capitalism can be displaced by more individual people choosing to be more ethical in their consumer and lifestyle choices. But the focus on local solutions appears more coherent these days.

Two main localist solutions presented them-

selves at the camp workshops — "transition towns" and "permaculture" — both of which have many desirable potentials for socialists in their ideology and methods. Neither are decisive measures but surely represent advances.

Another challenger for hearts and minds was the Tradeable Energy Quotas (TEQs) proselytisers. They addressed the fundamental scam of the EU Emission Trading Scheme by basing a master-plan on a new carbon standard which would replace the gold standard in the economy. This displays a glaring ignorance of how capitalism works, and is a conscious accommodation to capitalism.

Alongside this were the more sophisticated advocates of large scale techno fixes. These activists include George Monbiot, and seemed to be the real organising force of the climate camp. The techno fixers also wanted drastic carbon rationing with a view to reducing CO₂ emissions by 90%.

I share their belief that we face a tipping point in the climate change process in as little as seven years... They largely (and rightly) reject the new capitalist schemes of carbon trading, carbon offsetting and green consumerism as money making scams and cynical "greenwash" to appease the well-off.

Monbiot kindly warned the anarchists in the tent that they might not like it but tough situations require tough realities: the state will have to be convinced and used, no less, in order to avert climate change. How else will you get coach lanes on motorways and a European super-grid which then connects to Iceland, to Scandinavia and to North Africa as recommended by the German government. How indeed, George?

THROUGHOUT the entire camp I heard only one mention of the trade unions — by Monbiot, and in reference to some RMT-established statistic. While there was a pre-established consensus that "the public" must not be disrupted by the camp — not a single flight disrupted today for homemade organic jam tomorrow — there was no attempt to tackle the serious question of the jobs and livelihoods dependent on dirty emission-producing industries. Indeed, one socialist reporter has said that the camp organisers refused to meet with the pilots' union.

The TUC has initiated a lobby group with businesses to urge the government to opt for expansion on the basis of the creation of thousands of new jobs.

But there are two reasons to win workers' support. One is a democratic imperative — to collaborate in the formulation of job conversion ideas and demands to make on the government and BAA. The other is about creating a bigger, broader campaign. Without the workers on side, our aims will not prevail.

Both socialists and environmentalists need to put forward positive immediate demands for the environment that show to workers that it is possible to make environmentally-sound choices. For example, fighting for the re-nationalisation of the rail and public transport under workers' control is almost certainly a prerequi-

site for fares coming down within ground-level transport, and ultimately becoming free. The recent Metronet strikes for public ownership should be actively supported by anyone seriously concerned with practical solutions rather more than moralising about cheap domestic flights and the glory of cycling.

But better political solutions go hand in hand with better political democracy. The fact that socialist organisations along with the big NGOs were banned from having an organisational presence at the camp is not a good sign.

ANEW layer of young activists are being educated about the realities of environmental destruction and climate change. Socialists should pay attention to and try to get to grips with some of the technological and political solutions being debated. We should not allow real solutions to become ghettoised.

These eco-activists' sympathies are with common ownership, a struggle against alienation, social justice. It's not a bad starting point, and the low level of class struggle means there are few other alternatives.

The activists continue a long history of white middle class radical utopianism. With little direct experience, as a whole, of working-class realities, nor acknowledgement of the vast accumulated understanding of and struggle against capitalism among workers, they opt for superficial "single issue" struggles, necessarily alternating between moralising about the symptoms of a system and direct action which is never intended to have a mass social base.

On the other hand the international-working class socialist movement has a lot to learn about the pressing issues of bio diversity, ice-sheet melting and the albedo effect, peak-oil, carbon basins etc. Climate change is in the short-term the most pressing global issue for the working-class and oppressed peoples of the world who already suffer the worst extremes of its effects under capitalism.

Many of the debates I hear in the socialist movement focus on the worst politics of the green movement. No, we do not support measures that merely price out working-class people from newly accessible luxuries while allowing the rich to continue enjoying them apace. Neither do we settle for environmental strategies that leave capitalist social relations and exploitation largely untouched.

Many of us, myself included, dispute the belief among certain socialists that capitalism can adapt through techno-fixes and anti-pollution strategies. This is an extrapolation from the experience of environmental reform in capitalist metropolises and have no bearing on the scale and trajectory of destruction of the rest of the world.

If we are to be something other than brazen hypocrites and betrayers of the international working class — and indeed humanity — we have to fuse changed realities into immediate perspectives for international working-class revolution. We also urgently need to shed from our thinking the idea that that socialism is an inverted form of economic growth under capitalism. I'm sure it isn't.

Anyone who concerns themselves with Marx's prime concern about human alienation from the natural world — an intrinsic part of exploitation — and positively strives for meaningful human freedom will begin to have some serious affinity with many of the embryonic solutions to be found among the environmental movement.

It seems to me that our current paralysis and inertia partly represents a failure to think through the lessons of Stalinism and thoroughly sloughing off the anti-Marxism that went with it. The working-class can develop its own forms of organising production that can and must overcome human alienation from nature and can avert climate change.

Genuine international working-class revolution against capitalism, the self-activity of the working class, freeing up our creative — as opposed to destructive and consumptive capacities — can change and save the world.

SNP launches National Monologue

In the Scottish Parliamentary elections held in May this year the Scottish National Party emerged, albeit by the narrowest of margins, as the biggest single faction within the Scottish Parliament. Stan Crooke looks at what has happened since.

THE SNP now runs a minority administration, albeit with semi-formal support from the two Green MSPs.

SNP leader Alex Salmond and his party wants to build popular support and big business support for independence, in preparation for a referendum to be held in 2010.

Only a minority of the Scottish population currently supports independence for Scotland. Figures vary from one opinion poll to the next, but around one third of the electorate currently supports independence.

The SNP has been able to secure large donations from some of Scotland's captains of industry – £500,000 from Stagecoach co-owner Brian Souter, £100,000 from Kwik-Fit founder Sir Tom Farmer, and £50,000 from Galahad Gold chairman Ian Watson. And in the Holyrood election campaign a hundred Scottish businessmen put their names to a statement in support of the SNP. But still support for the SNP represents a minority current amongst the Scottish capitalist class.

There are three strands to the SNP strategy to build popular support for Scottish independence.

One strand is to implement politically popular measures. In the short term this includes: scrapping bridge tolls, scrapping graduate endowment fees for Scottish students, scrapping prescription charges for the chronically ill, reversing pre-May decisions to close down casualty departments in hospitals in Ayr and Monklands, and introducing a series of pilot schemes for free school meals for the youngest children in primary schools.

A second strand is best described as implementing the “trappings” of independence, in order to emphasise the “otherness” of Scotland from England, the better to win support for a transition to the substance of independence.

The Scottish Executive has been renamed the Scottish Government, ministers have been rebranded as Cabinet Secretaries, and the Royal Coat of Arms has been replaced by the Saltire on official documents. A separate Scottish civil service is to be created, and a Scottish Broadcasting Commission of Enquiry is to be set up.

The Scottish Government has also been promoting a more pro-European agenda, with Salmond prioritising relations with Brussels (and Belfast, as part of a “Celtic axis”) over relations with Westminster.

The third strand is to promote what the SNP has termed the National Conversation. This provides the opportunity for the SNP — in the guise of the Scottish Government — to campaign amongst the general population for independence for Scotland.

In mid-August the SNP government published a launch document entitled “Choosing Scotland's Future: A National Conversation: Independence and Responsibility in the Modern World”. The paper covers three options: status quo, greater devolution, and independence.

THERE is a limit to how long the SNP can implement even selected populist measures. There are already signs of the SNP retreating from manifesto commitments on issues such as ending student debt (which requires far more than scrapping graduate endowment fees) and reversing the Labour-Liberal Democrat coalition's attacks on the health service (which, again, requires more than keeping open two casualty departments).

Other policy commitments are guaranteed to prove more controversial. The SNP is committed to freezing the council tax at current levels, for example, which raises the question of how the consequent future shortfall in council spending will be covered. (Not from business rates, as



Alex Salmond

these are going to be cut or scrapped for small businesses.)

In the longer term, the SNP is pledged to replace the council by a flat-rate local income tax. This will benefit the lowest-paid, and will also lead to the highest-paid paying more for local services. But those on an average income will probably also end up paying more — unless local authorities cut jobs and services.

Implementing the “trappings” of independence is unlikely to have more than a limited impact.

The SNP's National Conversation has also been rather less than deafening to date. In the four weeks since the launch of the Conversation, Alex Salmond's statement on the Scottish Government website has attracted just 1,500 comments...

Another major problem faced by the SNP is the limited steps it can take, this side of independence, to demonstrate its pro-capitalist agenda: economic policy remains a reserved power for Westminster. Even so, the SNP rarely misses an opportunity to emphasise its pro-capitalist credentials. Nonetheless it is having a go.

The SNP is committed to “removing or cutting business rates from small businesses”. It has declared its “overarching priority” to be achieving “faster and more sustainable economic growth.” In an independent Scotland an SNP government would slash corporation tax in order to give Scotland “a competitive edge” in the globalised economy.

The SNP's has for long called itself “social democratic”. But that social democracy is broad enough to include a rather less than social democratic wing around Enterprise Minister Jim Mather (who has dismissed increasing income tax rates as “naïve in a knowledge economy”) and Finance Secretary John Swinney (who has promised to cut public sector spending by £1 billion a year), as well as the likes of Mike Russell and Dennis MacLeod. Their 2006 book, *Grasping the Thistle* argued for privatisation of water, trunk roads, the opening up of the public sector to market forces, the abolition of corporation and inheritance taxes, cuts in income tax, and a voucher-based education system.

THERE is little sign of the capitalist class in Scotland swinging round to support an independent Scotland: economic analysts generally remain singularly unconvinced by the SNP's arguments that an independent Scotland would be more profitable than a devolved Scotland.

Of those analysts who do endorse the SNP's pro-independence arguments, most do so from a Thatcherite standpoint: an independent Scotland would no longer be “cushioned” by subsidies from the British state, and would have to break out of its current “dependency culture” in order to compete effectively in the global capitalist market.

The SNP's arguments that income from oil

would sustain an independent Scotland look even more shaky. According to a recent report by the UK Offshore Operators Association, North Sea oil production ran at 2.9 million barrels a day in 2006, compared with 4.5 million barrels a day in 1996. By 2010 output is expected to decline to 2.6 million barrels a day, and to a million barrels a day by 2020. The costs of oil exploration and extraction are also rising rapidly: by 45% over the past nine years, with further increases expected in the years ahead.

THE residual Labour Left, organised in the Scottish Campaign for Socialism, was unable to find even the half a dozen Labour MSPs needed in order to nominate a left challenger to Wendy Alexander after Jack McConnell's resignation as Scottish Labour leader.

“Solidarity”, formed as a breakaway from the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), has little or no existence beyond a website.

The SSP itself is a weakened force, following on from Tommy Sheridan's destructive split and then the SSP's electoral wipe-out in the Holyrood elections. The appeal by the *News of the World* against the verdict in last years libel trial, plus the likelihood of Sheridan facing perjury charges, will impact negatively on the SSP.

The SNP government knows that if it would lose a referendum on independence if one were to be called right now.

Politically, what is most notable about much of the left in Scotland is the extent to which basic Marxist ideas about class and class struggle have been replaced, albeit to varying degrees, by an amorphous Scottish populism, frequently tainted by hangovers of Stalinism, in which half-spelt-out notions about “pushing the SNP to the left” increasingly displace the fundamental task of the self-organisation of the working class to achieve its own liberation.

According to the editorial in the current issue of *Scottish Left Review* (SLR: a non-party left-forum magazine), for example, the SNP's election victory means that “for social progressives in Scotland, suddenly things seem possible. ... We are now at the beginning of a new game, and there is more to be won by radicals.” Although, warns the SLR, this may prove to be “a mirage”, political demands which were previously a “wish list” may now be transformed into “a practical programme with a chance of success.”

The SLR is correct to point to the essentially conservative (with a small ‘c’) nature of earlier Holyrood administrations. It is equally correct to point out that the SNP government will implement measures politically unacceptable to its predecessors. But what does the SNP's goal of an independent capitalist Scotland, out of which flow its various policy initiatives, have in common with socialist class-struggle politics? And what, for that matter, does the SLR's own “practical programme with a chance of success” amount to?

A rather modest hotch-potch, beginning with “creating an internationally excellent and properly funded research centre for peace and justice in Scotland,” through “ending PFI/PPP by pursuing Public Service Trusts” and “investing significantly more in culture at all levels,” to “establishing Scottish cultural institutes and offices in Reykjavik, Oslo, Stockholm, Copenhagen and Helsinki” and “creating meaningful links with the Nordic countries.”

On the one hand, explains one article in SLR,

Scotland should integrate itself into “the Arc of Prosperity from Ireland through Iceland, to Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland.”

On the other hand, explains another article, Scotland should learn from Cuban government (its ability to mobilise the Cuban people!).

And for the rest of the left?

The verdict of “Solidarity” leader Sheridan on the creation of an SNP government was: “For the first time, Scotland has a nationalist government, and more importantly, a left-of-centre government.”

Both “Solidarity” and the SSP are enthusiastic about the SNP's National Conversation. The SSP “welcomes the coming National Conversation on Scotland's future. Unlike the three London-controlled parties, the SSP is not afraid of a wide-ranging debate, followed by a democratic vote on Scotland's future. We believe Scotland would be economically, politically, culturally and socially better off making our own decisions and standing on our own two feet.”

The SSP statement concludes with what appears to be a call for collaboration by all pro-independence forces: “We believe that the forces in favour of independence — including the SNP, the SSP, the Greens, the Independence Convention, and Independence First — have a major battle on the hands to win the Scottish people decisively to the cause of Scottish independence.” (The SSP, in any case, already backs the cross-party Independence Convention and the “no-party” Independence First campaign.)

BUT neither “Solidarity” nor the SSP point out the essentially undemocratic nature of the SNP's National Conversation and its referendum question.

The SNP government knows that it would lose a referendum on independence if one were to be called right now.

In order to build support for independence, and also to increase the pressure on other parties to vote in favour of staging a referendum in 2010, the SNP government has therefore launched a National Conversation — paid for out of the public spending which the SNP is otherwise committed to reducing — in which the SNP will be doing the bulk of the talking.

The *Choosing Scotland's Future: A National Conversation* document specifically rejects the idea of two referenda on independence — one mandating the Scottish government to negotiate for independence, and a second one to allow the electorate to vote for or against independence on the terms eventually negotiated.

The proposed referendum question entrusts the SNP (Scottish government) to negotiate the terms of independence for Scotland.

And it is the SNP alone which would be entrusted with such negotiations: Labour, the Lib Dems and the Tories are all against independence. Presumably, the SNP's calculation is that if it were to win a “yes” vote in a referendum in 2010 it would romp home to an absolute parliamentary majority in the following year's elections. For this reason alone, I think even socialists who support independence for Scotland should vote “no” in such a referendum: a “yes” vote would be a vote of confidence in the SNP, and a mandate to the SNP for the creation of a capitalist Scotland.)

As an article in the current issue of *Frontline* (originally the magazine of the successor to the “Militant” tendency in the SSP, but now under the name of “an independent Marxist voice in the SSP”) puts it, the current period is “one of the lowest points that the forces of Scottish socialism have been at for a generation.”

But unless the forces of socialism in Scotland think through basic questions about the class nature of the SNP and the SNP government, ridding themselves in the process of their fantasies about the political significance of an independent Scotland, and re-orient to basic class politics, then they are likely to continue to hover around that low point for some time to come.

The Battle of Lewisham

It is thirty years since anti-fascists fought the fascist National Front and their protectors, the police, on the streets of southeast London at the "Battle of Lewisham" of 1977. The NF was routed. It was an important working-class victory and contrasts strikingly with the lame "anti-fascism" of today — when the labour movement scarcely lifts its collective finger as the BNP take up council seats in places like Dagenham. Dan Katz tells the story.

THE POLARISED class struggle of the early 1970s had a toxic by-product: the emergence of a populist British fascism. The National Front (NF), led by John Tyndall and Martin Webster, grew rapidly. The NF campaigned against black immigration and its members and sympathisers were responsible for a series of racist attacks.

It didn't help that the labour movement was extremely slow to shake off its backwardness on questions of race: one turning point was the mass union support for the Asian Grunwicks strikers, after August 1976.

Another key period was the left-led anti-racist and anti-fascist protests against the Front during the late 70s. These actions cemented the idea that the left and the labour movement were forces that could effectively confront racism and fascism. Central to that period was the "Battle of Lewisham".

The background

In the mid-70s the fascists were winning votes in local elections. The National Front had won 44,000 votes in elections in Leicester in 1976. With the National Party — a breakaway from the Front — the total fascist vote reached 38 per cent in local elections in Blackburn. The NF received 119,000 votes in the May 1977 Greater London Council elections, and almost quarter of a million votes across the country in that year's local elections. During this period, the National Front claimed to have up to 20,000 members, and it had the money and the resources to distribute five million leaflets each year. The NF stood 413 candidates in local elections in 1977.

In Lewisham, southeast London — an area with a large African-Caribbean working class population — the fascists had found some support. They were able to win 44% in a local election in Deptford (the NF vote combined with the National Party).

On 30 May 30 1977 the overtly racist local police staged dawn raids on 30 homes in New Cross and Lewisham. They picked up 60 black youth and charged 21 with "conspiracy to steal from persons unknown", and "loitering with intent".

In response, the Lewisham 21 Defence Committee was set up to support those arrested, as well as three others arrested in a subsequent scuffle with police.

On Saturday 2 July the Lewisham 21 Defence Committee demonstrated in New Cross. According to local papers, "300 demonstrators marched through Lewisham and New Cross" and more than 100 National Front supporters turned out to attack them. One newspaper reported that "Shoppers rushed for cover as racials stormed down New Cross Road" and that the NF threw bottles, "rotten fruit and bags of caustic soda at marchers". More than 60 people, fascists and anti-fascists, were arrested.

The following Monday, 4 July, NF organiser Richard Edmunds declared that the Front would march in New Cross in August. He claimed that thousands of fascists would demonstrate to "clear the streets of black muggers and their red friends".

The same day the All Lewisham Campaign Against Racism and Fascism (ALCARAF) called for peaceful demonstration to take place on same day as NF march.

However three weeks later, 600 people attended a public meeting in Lewisham Concert Hall called by Lewisham 21 Defence Committee. They had a different idea. The meeting passed a motion calling "for a united mobilisation to stop the Nazis... We call for all black people, socialists and trade unionists, to assemble at 1 pm on August 13 at Clifton Rise, New Cross, so that

Daily Mail



Mail

MONDAY, AUGUST 15, 1977

8p (CHANNEL ISLANDS 9p)

Daily Mail COMMENT

After the Battle of Lewisham, a question of vital importance

NOW WHO WILL DEFEND HIM?

A CARVING knife, honed to razor sharpness. A metal pipe, with wickedly lacerating studs. These exhibits, held grimly aloft by a London bobby, come from the murderous weaponry deployed against the police on Bloody Saturday.

Truly they are the regalia of hate. Hate for the police, for authority, for law and order and liberties enshrined within that order.

Here was no honest, spontaneous anger by decent people against a racist parade.

This was a contrived assault, with acid and knife and brick and bludgeon on the police: an evil and premeditated attempt to scar authority, slash liberty and engender panic and fear in an already troubled community.

Gashed, bruised and bleeding, Britain's police held the front line for freedom. They have not seen rougher nor more ominous action since the Thirties.

In defending the right of the repellent National Front to march through the racially sensitive areas of Lewisham and Deptford, they presented themselves as the prime target for the Red storm-troopers of the Left.

But it wasn't bags of flour and placards and jeers they had to face this time. It was blinding ammonia and caustic soda.

Yesterday, on BBC radio, a leader of the Socialist Workers' Party rubbed in the meaning of this vicious confrontation which saw more than 50 policemen injured. It was all the fault of the police, he said. Their's was the provocation. And the ammonia? And the knives? He refused, though repeatedly challenged, to condemn their use.

Saturday, August 13, 1977, is a

Callaghan intervenes —Page TWO

Extremists' challenge —Page THREE

The dangers, by Lord Hailsham—Page SIX

The shields of freedom Centre Pages



"They shall not pass". Clifton Rise was the area near New Cross station where the NF march, now set for Saturday 13 August, was due to assemble.

Workers' Action, a forerunner of *Solidarity*, urged a mass turnout, saying both the peaceful march and the attempt to stop the fascists assembling should be backed, but that, "the main thrust should be to take the measures necessary to prevent the insult of fascists parading through Lewisham... maximum possible support should be given at Clifton Rise".

At the beginning of August Martin Webster, the NF's national organiser, told press: "The Reds have had it all their own way and the only way you can fight Communism is to confront it. We believe that the multi-racial society is wrong, is

evil and we want to destroy it." Richard Edmunds commented: "We are deliberately going into the black areas of Deptford because these are also the areas where we have a lot of support", and: "This march is deliberately provocative."

Lewisham's Labour Council petitioned the Labour Home Secretary to have the NF march banned. But Metropolitan Police commissioner David McNee issued a statement opposing ban, saying that it "would not only defer to mob rule but encourage it". McNee was clearly looking for a confrontation.

On the day, two types of anti-fascism

Anti-fascists began assembling at Clifton Rise from 11.00 am.

Simultaneously the ALCARAF demonstration

gathered in the rain in Ladywell Fields, two miles away. The South London Press reported that, "Over 5000 people from more than 80 organisations congregat[e] in Ladywell Fields to hear speeches by the Mayor of Lewisham and the Bishop of Southwark."

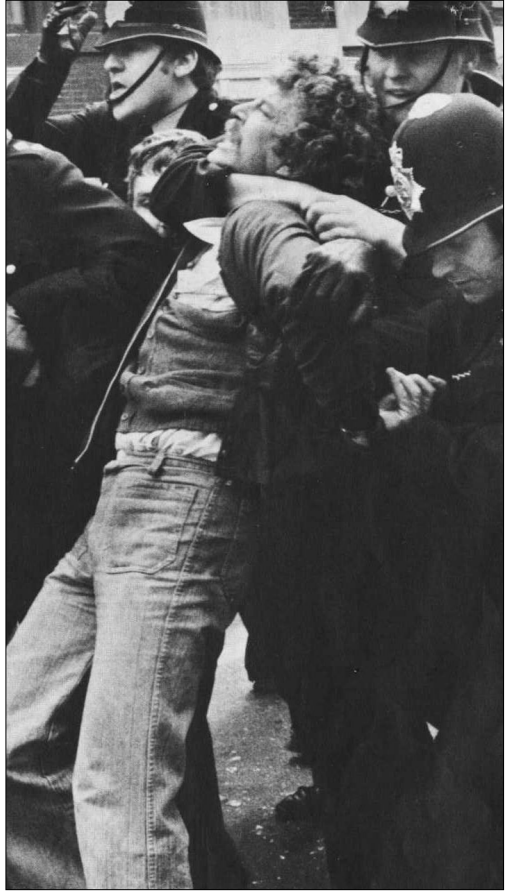
The march took half an hour to leave the park on its way to New Cross. But police blocked the way, a mile short of New Cross at the junction of Loampit Hill and Algernon Road in Lewisham town centre.

ALCARAF leader and Communist Party member Mike Power appealed "for the march to disband peacefully." Although the march had been stopped many protesters found their way through the backstreets to New Cross.

From 1.30pm, 800 National Front members,

Daily Mail hysteria

Lewisham, 1977



Clockwise from top left: National Front supporters attack anti-racist demonstrator; Four police arrest anti-fascist protestor; anti-fascists capture an NF flag; anti-racist defends himself from NF

protected by the police, began to assemble in Achilles Street, New Cross. According to the *Times* 4,000 anti-fascists were there to meet them.

The police moved in to clear a path for the fascists and “two orange smoke bombs were thrown, and a tin of red paint”. Clifton Rise and New Cross Road “became a seething mass of demonstrators and police. Police helmets were knocked off as arrests were made.” (*Kent Mercury*).

All hell broke loose as anti-fascists and local black youth fought the police and the fascists under a shower of bricks, bottles, wood and smoke bombs. Participants included local house-holders throwing missiles from their windows.

Two mounted police were dragged from their horses and anti-fascists threw dustbins and fence posts at the NF ranks. “Half the [NF] marchers remained in Pagnell Street, afraid to walk into the hail of missiles.” (*Kent Mercury*)

As the fighting raged in New Cross, the Bishop of Southwark led a church service against racism and for peace at St Stephen’s Church, central Lewisham. The banner outside read, “Justice, love and peace.”

Lessons for us

If on 13 August 1977 we had only had was a peaceful march that dispersed quietly at the police’s request, then the NF would have been allowed to parade and grow, and we would remember the day as a setback.

The great victory at Lewisham was won by the

thousands of anti-racists who understood the need to physically confront fascism.

Against a serious threat of fascism, church services are worse than useless. And so are appeals to the police and state to help us. In Lewisham 1977 the police acted as racist provocateurs and protectors of the Front.

Of course there was a backlash in the press, which denounced the anti-fascists as violent “red fascists”. But the Front were stopped, battered and defeated.

Against the threat of fascism we are entitled to defend our communities and ourselves. The only force that can stop fascism is the left and the labour movement.

To mark the 30th anniversary of the Battle of Lewisham a series of commemorations are planned in the area where it took place, including:

- a walk along the route of the march/counter-protest, including people involved at the time. This will start from Clifton Rise, New Cross at 3 pm on Saturday 15th September 2007.

- a Love Music Hate Racism gig at Goldsmiths Student Union on Saturday 27th October 2007.

- a half day event in New Cross on Saturday 10th November with speakers, films and a social event in the evening (2 pm start at Goldsmiths College, New Cross).

For more info see lewisham77.blogspot.com

Participants remember

“In the event, it was the anti-racists, involving for the first time large numbers of the local black youth, who came out on top in a day of bitter street fighting. The NF march was partially blocked at New Cross when it set off in the early afternoon, only getting through after repeated police charges against the anti-racist demonstrators. The battered remnants of the NF were then shepherded by the police towards Deptford, then led towards Lewisham town centre, only to find it completely blocked by thousands of anti-racists, many of whom had moved rapidly from New Cross to Lewisham, sweeping aside the occasional police cordon as they did so.”

“The police diverted the NF towards an isolated section of Blackheath Common to which the NF coaches had been redirected prior to a speedy and ignominious departure. Sometime later in the afternoon the police used riot shields for the first time in mainland Britain to disperse the anti-

racists from Lewisham High Street and then to press them back into a network of sidestreets.”

(*Ted Parker*)

“At one point the march was smashed completely in half as hundreds of anti-nazis broke through the ranks of police and engaged the Front in vicious hand-to-hand fighting. On Lewisham Way, anti-racists and local people attacked the front of the march... Frontiers were running around in a blind panic, and the march just seemed to disintegrate as wave after wave of attacks hit them from all sides. Shortly afterwards the police put them on coaches and trains in a bid to stop all the violence. However, small-scale skirmishing continued. NF coaches were bricked as they left the area and the police again attacked the counter-demonstrators.”

(*Steve Tilzey*)

Some history for the bemused

BY MARTIN THOMAS

THE *Weekly Worker* group invited an AWL member to debate Iraq (or was it Iran? their story is not clear) at their recent summer school.

We said yes, and delegated a representative of our majority view on Iraq. No, the WW then said, they wouldn't debate. They would only accept an AWLer who disagrees with our majority view.

The AWL, pretty much uniquely on the left, has a rule that members with minority views not only can but are expected to express those views in public (while not *campaigning against* our organisation, and while explaining the majority view as best they can). But, well, if we're invited to a debate, we want AWL policy represented by someone who agrees with it...

Mark Fischer of the WW, in recent articles (30 August 2007), turns this round into a story of us "banning a member of [our] 'troops out of Iraq' minority from speaking".

AWL believes that the scuttling of the US troops which scaffold the disintegrating polity of Iraq would unleash full-scale civil war between the various sectarian Islamic clerical-fascist militias, intervention by Iran and probably other neighbouring states, a bloody carving-up of Iraq, and the crushing of the Iraqi labour movement. We also stand in intransigent working-class hostility to the US/UK troops. Our conclusion: solidarity with the Iraqi labour movement, against both the US/UK and the sectarian militias.

Some people argue that the Iraqi "resistance", or sections of it, could effect a real if imperfect national liberation of Iraq. Others estimate that the current Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki, which is after all elected, after a fashion, could survive US withdrawal and thus embody some national liberation. Yet others may believe that the Iraqi labour movement is strong enough to become, in a workable future, the agent of "troops out".

Real issues, real arguments. The problem with the WW is that it cites our *assessment*, makes no attempt to debate it or offer a different one, but instead just screeches: "If you say such things, that makes you 'pro-occupation', 'troops in'."

To go into the details of Fischer's contortions would be to aid his effort of displacing political debate by scandal-mongering. It may, however, be worth explaining to the bemused observer the general pattern behind such WW operations as using the fate of the peoples of Iraq simply as grist for logic-chopping.

The *Weekly Worker* group was, for the first decade and a half of its existence, a (small) hard-line Stalinist splinter of the disintegrating Communist Party.

Around the mid-1990s, it started to mutate. Over the following years, it adopted, one by one, a series of ideas from non-Stalinist socialism — Hillel Ticktin's ideas on the USSR, Steve Freeman's ideas on the monarchy being the central question in British politics, and then (a version of) our ideas on Israel-Palestine, on Ireland, on "reactionary anti-imperialism", and, finally, on the Labour Party.

Naturally, we tried to talk to them in a friendly way. We were bemused by their blank failure to engage when we challenged their many remaining Stalinist-stock ideas.

In late 2001 WW proposed a merger of their paper with *Solidarity*. Knowing the intractable differences in basic political culture, and the vast difference in practical orientation of the two papers, we said that was hardly realistic.

Jack Conrad, WW's top writer, promptly set about us with a polemic in the tone (as

we put it at the time) "of a high priest scourging an apostate" (28 February 2002).

What was going on? As the polemics flooded the pages of WW, it became clear that they were designed to "fish" (unsuccessfully, as it turned out) for a minority in the AWL (one person, in fact) more inclined to give credence to the idea of a WW/*Solidarity* merger as "the paper of the Socialist Alliance".

To round out the fishing operation, WW discoursed about the evil "economistic wing" of the AWL — which, on the basis of eagerly-reported gossip about "body language" and casual conversation, they claimed to be led by Mark Osborn and Jill Mountford — and the irresolution of the "political wing" in combating that "economistic wing". An internal document of theirs revealed why they had been so blank in discussion: their explicit aim in talking with us had always been, not to examine ideas, but to find ways to "split" us.

All Conrad's show of "high theory" was merely gloss for such manoeuvring. This time, too, the concocted "scandal" about debating Iraq is merely a lever to shit-stir.

The tin lid was put on it when we questioned their reprinting with only trivial demur (11 October 2001) of a screed of theirs from their full-on Stalinist days praising the 1978 Stalinist "revolution" in Afghanistan. The ensuing row, which included a series of seven huge articles denouncing us by Jack Conrad (starting November 2002) but failed to include any substantive reply on the question of Stalinism, confirmed our view that this was a group with which, as Trotsky once said of another similar, one should watch their fingers and not their theses.

And then, of course, after chiding us in 2001-2 as insufficiently unconditional in our hostility to Taliban clerical-fascism, they rallied to the SWP's "adoption" of the Muslim Association of Britain, and joined Respect in 2004.

Will they even take their own ostensible ideas seriously? Given the bizarre charivari of mutually-contradictory borrowed notions those ideas are, it's a hard thing to ask of them. But in any case they don't.

- Assessment of WW we made in September 2002:

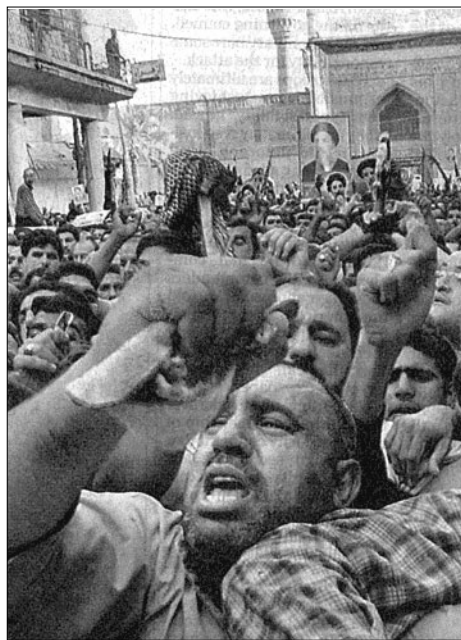
www.workersliberty.org/node/330

- *In Defence of the October Revolution*: a detailed reply to WW's exalting the 1978 Stalinist coup in Afghanistan as the equal of the Russian workers' revolution:

www.workersliberty.org/taxonomy/term/65

- "Never Stalinist?" The short comment about their Stalinist record which prompted the storm in 2002:

www.workersliberty.org/node/354.



Iraq: why no debate?

Galloway vs the SWP

BY SACHA ISMAIL

IN a letter to the Respect Coalition national committee, George Galloway declares that "relations between leading figures in Respect are at an all-time low", that the group's membership "has not grown... in some areas it has gone into a steep decline", and that it could easily face "oblivion" within the next year. What's going on?

Under Galloway's characteristic style, two main issues emerge. Firstly, he wants Respect to be much more purely an electoral machine (!), with less emphasis on all this nonsense about trade unions ("Organising for Fighting Unions") and, even worse, gay liberation (the Respect intervention at Pride) And secondly, he wants greater control over the machine, with fewer SWP members as staff and a new National Organiser position alongside the National Secretary, SWPer John Rees.

Galloway has already announced — whether following an internal discussion or off the top of his head — that at the next election he will stand for Poplar and Canning Town, where Respect got 16.9% in 2005, against Labour's 40%. Meanwhile, he faces an 18-day suspension from Parliament in October.

Perhaps Galloway is thinking about other career moves? To consistent revolutionary socialists, the SWP's politics are pathetic: but to Galloway, they must seem like a left-wing embarrassment and roadblock to his plans for self-promotion.

Let him have his career in business, hack journalism, or whatever. We can only hope that any attempts he makes to break up Respect jolt the committed and good-hearted socialists that remain in the SWP into wondering how on earth they got into an alliance with this sleazebag.

Saddam's gold revisited

BY MARTIN THOMAS

AS mentioned above, George Galloway is facing an 18-day suspension from Parliament, due to start on 8 October, after a report by the House of Commons "committee on standards and privileges".

Newspaper accounts of this report on Galloway's financial links with Saddam Hussein's Iraq gave Galloway a very soft ride.

Read the full report, however, and you will see that it went into the issue of the documents published by the *Daily Telegraph* in 2003, allegedly showing financial links between Galloway and Saddam Hussein's regime.

It found that "Unlike Mr Galloway (who was offered the opportunity to examine the *Telegraph* documents), we have ourselves seen them in their totality and with the files in which they were found. We have little doubt, based on the evidence we have received, including the forensic evidence, that those documents which are relevant to our inquiry are authentic. We note that, in his evidence to us, Mr Galloway did not explicitly rule out this possibility either..."

Galloway has traded on the idea that the success of his libel case against the *Telegraph* shows the documents to be forgeries, but the committee notes that "neither the authenticity nor the veracity of the documents was an issue in Mr Galloway's successful libel action against the *Telegraph*... The *Telegraph*... had at one stage indicated to the court its wish to prove the authenticity of the documents... the judge ruled against the paper on the grounds that the authenticity of the documents was in his view not relevant to the qualified privilege and fair comment defences raised by the paper in the proceedings".

The committee also reports that Galloway "told the Commissioner that he regularly met

the Iraqi Chargé d'Affaires in London to keep him informed of his proposed plans and accepted that these might be described as a working programme... We were struck by the way a coherent and credible story emerges from the key documents, whose authenticity we accept, and conclude that they accurately describe aspects of Mr Galloway's involvement in securing Iraqi funding for the Mariam Appeal. This reinforces our view, in the light of our conclusions on authenticity, that in the absence of evidence to the contrary, it is reasonable to presume that what the documents say is true."

The committee also "take the view that the alleged record of the meeting between Mr Galloway and Saddam Hussein in August 2002 is authentic", i.e. "that some of his activities in support of the Iraqi regime may have been financed through an oil-related mechanism".

Why on earth is none of this even marginally an issue in the conflict between Galloway and the SWP?

Galloway vs MP

GALLOWAY'S announcement that he will be standing against New Labour minister Jim Fitzpatrick in Poplar and Canning Town at the next general election was made in characteristic style. In his Talksport Radio address (yes), Galloway put it like this:

"It's going to be a battle of the Scots in the East End of London. Me standing in the tradition of Keir Hardie, him standing in the tradition of Ramsay MacDonald, the betrayer of everything Labour stands for. It's going to be a very interesting contest."

Keir Hardie, for all his religious and political confusion, was a class-conscious socialist militant. What would he have made of an ex-Labour politician like Galloway, who does not even rise to the level of middle-class liberalism? In any case, Galloway's announcement continues on his website in even more interesting way, denouncing Jim Fitzpatrick's voting record on a series of issues: for ID cards, for foundation hospitals, for top-up fees, for the Iraq war — and for equal gay rights.

So why has Fitzpatrick's support for gay rights been included as one bad thing among man? No doubt this would play well among more conservative Muslims and Christians in Poplar and Canning Town — the people who Galloway no doubt sees as his base.

Yvonne Ridley vs the Iranian workers

"Knowing the truth is the right of all human beings, but the media today is the number one means used by the authorities to keep control," commented Iran's president Mahmoud Ahmedinejad in July, as the Iranian state launched the "Press TV" satellite channel in order to "break the global media stranglehold of western outlets". Press TV will no doubt be part of the apparatus by which Ahmedinejad's regime controls the media when it launches further crack downs on dissident publications and stations.

So far, so bad. But why should we be particularly bothered?

One of Press TV's presenters is leading Respect member Yvonne Ridley. While Ridley's softness on the Islamic Republic, and the SWP's willingness to put up with and even echo it, are well known, this — becoming a direct mouthpiece for the Iranian state — is a new and appalling development. Again it has not been mentioned in the rows currently engulfing Respect.

Class-crossed lovers

SOFIE BUCKLAND REVIEWS ATONEMENT

ENGLAND, 1935, and four children are putting on a play. The author, Briony, forced to give the lead role to another, snaps: “if I cannot be the lead, I think I will direct, thank you very much”.

So the scene is set for *Atonement*, the film adaptation of Ian McEwan’s 2001 novel. The film revolves around Briony’s fantasies and need for drama, and the one mistake for which she is too old to be completely forgiven.

In the summer of 1935, the Tallis household is waiting for weekend guests. Beautifully shot and acted, the scene evokes the political tension and sexual repression of the late 1930s.

Briony (Romola Garai), the youngest Tallis at 13, is frustrated that her play will not be performed for guests, and desperately seeking drama. In the background to her typewritten fantasies, her sister Cecilia (Keira Knightley) falls in love with the university-educated housekeeper’s son Robbie (James McAvoy). With the collected incidents of a perceived sexual humiliation, a pornographic love letter and the sexual assault of a guest, the scene is set for Briony’s lie, turning the course of the protagonist’s lives for good.

The film jumps four years to World War Two, following Robbie as a jarringly over-educated private soldier amongst working-class London lads in Northern France. The scenes at Dunkirk are surreal and hellish — from soldier’s choirs in broken bandstands to the shooting of the horses, to the torn, bombed out sailing ship on the beach, McAvoy’s character wanders desperately, unaware if he’ll ever make it home. Neither these nor the London hospital scenes flinch from the horrors of war, the blood, or the tension for lovers of waiting to see if either survives.

There are even hints of anti-war sentiment, rather than the usual nostalgic patriotism in such films — Robbie’s companion, a cheeky



James McAvoy as Robbie

working-class Cockney, jokes about giving Europe to Germany because “Britain’s got Africa”, a tacit acknowledgement of the imperial roots of the war. Later, in Dunkirk, the audience catches the end of an anti-hierarchy army song.

The war is shown from a working-class perspective — the nurses, the soldiers lost in France with no superiors, the bloody, dirty horror of it, with no mention of the glories of war. There are no Germans, or imperial sentiments about the honour of dying for one’s country, or even a purpose. It’s just hell.

And, aside from the war, this is no ordinary

story of frustrated love across the classes — McAvoy’s Robbie is bright, aspiring and looks to have almost escaped his working-class background. At the beginning of the film it seems almost possible, despite the class divide, that he could win the girl from the big house.

But as Robbie writes Cecilia an explicit note, it’s hard to avoid shouting at the screen — his acceptance into the bourgeois world is shaky to say the least, and unlikely to withstand any sexual transgression.

Neither is this a story of working-class desire to become bourgeois. Whilst discussing

university with Cecilia, McAvoy’s character forcefully declares he will “pay [her] father back” for funding him through Cambridge. Later, in the Dunkirk scenes, he writes a letter talking of a “life without shame” — searching, throughout the film, simply for dignity.

Of course, all of this is tempered by the film’s last twist (don’t worry, I won’t reveal it — go see for yourself), which entirely changes the character of the story. Far above the tale of class-crossed lovers, this is a film about Briony’s lie, and her continual drive to both atone for her mistake, and become the central character in the drama of her life.

Good haters, bad democrats

DALE STREET REVIEWS THE BLAIR YEARS — EXTRACTS FROM THE ALASTAIR CAMPBELL DIARIES

“Some twat with a Trot poster came up to me on the way in (to the conference) and yelled ‘Butcher! Traitor!’ at me,” writes Campbell in his diary entry for 29 April 1995. “I stopped and mustered as much visual contempt as I could, then assured him that if we win the general election, then don’t worry — thanks to wankers like him, there will always be another Tory government along afterwards. These people make me vomit.”

There are many people in Campbell’s diaries who make him want to vomit.

Roy Hattersley is “a fat pompous bugger”. Bernard Ingham is “a silly old fucker”. Matthew Parris is “a little shit”. Martin Sixsmith is “a twat”. Simon Jenkins is “a total wanker”. And as for Clare Short, singled out for serial abuse throughout Campbell’s diaries, she is “the most self-indulgent and attention-seeking of all the Shadow Cabinet ... God, does she turn my stomach.”

In fact, such is Campbell’s general disdain for the rest of humanity that, asked on one occasion by Peter Mandelson whether he actually likes anyone, Campbell names only his children and his partner (when she is not arguing) — “the rest can fuck off.”

There are also many people in Campbell’s

diaries who make his patron, Tony Blair, want to vomit as well. Trade unions and trade union general secretaries feature particularly prominently amongst such people.

When Campbell “reported back to TB” after a meeting with the then UNISON General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe, who had “come round for another general whinge”, Blair’s response was to tell Campbell: “They can just fuck off. We will never get elected if every little change produces this kind of nonsense.”

The “little change” in question was the re-writing of Clause Four. Union opposition to the re-writing of Clause Four was a particular target of Blair’s loathing: “Pat (McFadden) called to say the TGWU were joining UNISON in opposing us (over Clause Four). This produced the inevitable tirade (from Blair): ‘These people are criminally stupid. They simply do not care if we win or lose’.”

In the run-up to the 1995 TGWU conference, Blair launched a further broadside at the union: “He (Blair) was almost speechless with rage. ‘These people are stupid and they are malevolent. ... They complain that we want to distance ourselves, and then give us all the evidence why we should distance ourselves. I have no option but to go up there (to TGWU conference) and blow them out of the water. I’m finished with these people. Absolutely finished with them.’”

Blair’s opinion of Labour Party members, and Labour Party activists in particular —

of whom there were still a substantial number when Blair was elected party leader — was scarcely any higher than his opinion of trade union activists.

Party activists were simply out of touch with the real world. In December of 1994 the press ran a story that Labour intended taxing school fees. Campbell records Blair’s response on being informed of the press coverage: “The exasperated silence spoke volumes. He went into one of his ‘will we ever get serious’ tirades. Do we care about what a few activists think, or do we care about what millions of people think?”

Activists also failed to recognise the promethean status of Blair himself. In the 1997 election campaign Campbell writes: “Phillip Gould called from the (focus) groups to say there was a real sense that TB had the energy and the drive to get Britain going. That was the same message coming through on the phone banks in the Pennine belt. I said to TB later: ‘So much of this hangs on you.’ He sighed: ‘I know, and the only people who don’t know it are in the Labour Party’.”

Blair had even less time for Labour traditions than he had for its members: “TB would push change as hard as it would go, and he was able to do it because he was different. His lack of roots actually in some ways helped politically. He could do things Neil (Kinnock, Blair’s predecessor-but-one) might have wanted to do but would have found more difficult.”

When Blair decided to send one of his

children to a grant-maintained school, one of his advisers suggested that “it gave the party the sense he (Blair) wasn’t one of them.” In a rare moment of incisiveness, Campbell points out that not being “one of them” is “his (Blair’s) strength and his weakness.” It was his “strength” because it meant that he was not hidebound by tradition. And it was his “weakness” because it isolated him from the broader party membership.

Blair was much more on the Lib Dems’ political wavelength than on that of the movement of which he had been elected political leader.

On the eve of Labour’s election victory in 1997 Blair was already considering the idea of a merger with the Lib Dems: “He (Blair) stunned me straight out with the boldest plan yet. ‘How would people feel if I gave Paddy (Ashdown) a place in the Cabinet and started merger talks?’ Fuck me. I loved the boldness of it, but doubted he could get it through the key players. ... He’d hinted at it a few times in the past, but this sounded like a plan. ... We flew back by helicopter. TB asked me repeatedly if I thought he could put Ashdown in the Cabinet. ‘It makes sense politically,’ he said.”

If the publication of Campbell’s diaries has any value, then it is to confirm the extent to which the Blairite takeover of the Labour Party was not simply just another shift to the right — of which there has been no shortage in the party’s history — but a ‘project’ undertaken by political forces fundamentally hostile to the history, values and traditions of the labour movement.

In fact, however, it is questionable in the extreme whether the publication of the diaries serves any political purpose whatsoever.

Such occasional anecdotes and incidents apart, the diaries are largely taken up with what Campbell himself refers to as “Peyton fucking Place” — the trivia and title-tattle of the personal grouches and relationships of members of Blair’s Shadow Cabinet and of his first and second governments.

Drumming to a different beat

BRUCE ROBINSON ASSESSES THE LIFE AND WORK OF MAX ROACH

THERE can be few musicians who have revolutionised the way their instrument is played, helped change the whole history of their music and remained innovative and open over 50 years.

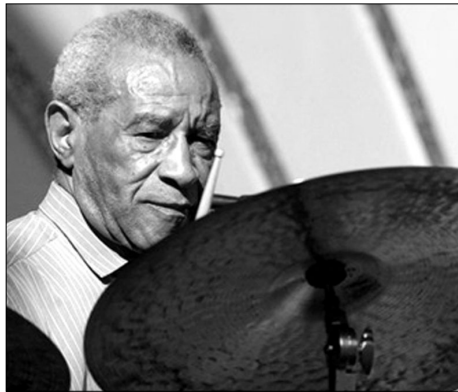
Add to that a radical social and political commitment and a keen awareness of how that was expressed in the history of jazz and could be expressed in his own music, and you get Max Roach, the jazz drummer, who has died aged 83 in New York.

Max Roach first began getting noticed in the early 1940s just as the new jazz style of bebop was starting to take off. Many of bebop's innovations were rhythmic and Max, alongside Kenny Clarke, defined a new style of drumming to match. The basic rhythm was now spelled out on the cymbals, leaving the bass drum to punctuate the music with accents ('dropping bombs') and allowing a more varied role to the drummer.

From 1945-9 Roach was at the forefront of the new music as he played in Charlie Parker's quintet, also taking part in Miles Davis' 1949 "Birth of the Cool" recordings. In 1954, he started the first of his own groups with the young trumpeter Clifford Brown, again pointing the way forward in the music. When Brown died in a road accident aged 26 in 1956, Roach was shattered but continued to put groups together, eventually discovering another new trumpet star, Booker Little (also to die in his 20s).

In the 50s Roach began to rebel against the way the "bebop business" was run. He was a co-founder of an independent record label, Debut, with Charles Mingus. He also took part in the alternative "rebel" Newport Jazz Festival in protest at the ignoring of a whole range of black musicians across the generations by the organisers of the main event.

The 50s also saw African colonies win independence and the start of the US Civil Rights movement, both of which had considerable impact on black jazz musicians. In



Max Roach

1960, a time when support for the Civil Rights movement could by no means be taken for granted, Roach brought out *We Insist! — The Freedom Now Suite* featuring a cover depicting three Civil Rights protestors sitting in at a segregated lunch counter. The music evoked slavery — a drum-voice duet with his then wife, singer Abbey Lincoln, graphically painting its torture and terror — followed by themes of the false hopes of Emancipation at the end of the US Civil War, and the struggle against apartheid. He followed it with two other "political" albums, *Percussion Bitter Sweet* and *It's Time*, which featured a large choir. For much of the rest of the 60s he was effectively banned from recording and during this period identified himself as a supporter of Malcolm X.

In the 70s he got a post in a university teaching Black Studies and continued to record. In 1981 he set King's "I have a dream" speech to a very strong drum solo. He recorded an album about the Scottsboro boys, victims of a judicial lynching in the South of the US in the early 30s (whose fate had been the subject of a big campaign by the Communist Party).

While most of Roach's recording at this time was with his own quartet, he remained open to newer musical styles, recording with jazz avant-gardists, Archie Shepp, Anthony Braxton and Cecil Taylor, and hip hop

artists, whom he saw as directly in the African-American tradition of music making. He also worked with a string quartet, making use of them to play jazz lines, rather than using them as orchestral backing as in the "With strings" bands of the 50s.

This openness corresponded to his conception of the drummer's role in jazz, which he never saw as one of providing rhythmic background interspersed with the odd crash-bang solo. Rather he saw the modern drum kit as a full musical instrument, a new invention of the 20th century, which black jazz musicians had played a major role in developing. (He paid his musical respects to predecessors such as Big Sid Catlett and Jo Jones).

His solos had a logic, and he used the different tones available on the kit so that one could often hear a melody, directly or implied. From the 50s, he began investigating alternative time signatures to 4/4, which then dominated jazz. Many of his performances featured a solo using the foot-operated hi-hat cymbal to show the range of musical expression he could get from even such a limited instrument, and in the 80s he would sometimes appear solo. In the late 70s, he put together a group, "M'Boom" consisting entirely of percussion instruments.

The connection between music and politics was, for Max, not dependent on explicitly political musical content. Rather two were inseparable, particularly in the case of jazz, as he stated in a 1980 interview:

"Jazz has always been under attack from the days of Buddy Bolden [ca 1900]... right up to today. Bolden because he improvised. In the 20s they had 'race' records and decent people weren't supposed to listen because the music wasn't 'civilised'. It was an outlet to protest at the indignities faced by black people.

"Now it frees people all over the world."

"Politically, I see jazz as very democratic music. It expresses democracy whereas European classical music expresses imperialism. European music is run by two people — the composer and the conductor who treat the rest of the musicians as slaves. In jazz,

we debate a topic, the musicians are free to discuss it. It's like a meeting...

"[Critics] separate art from society, but art grows from society."

He put this in a broader context and showed a political viewpoint that went well beyond civil rights or "black consciousness":

"Most people believe the Sixties was an isolated period, but it wasn't. There is only one instance of a city being bombed in the United States and it was by the government, to put down a race riot in Oklahoma in 1918. We have the oppression of black people, you in Britain have Ireland; it's the same thing — imperialism...

"You see, this music is very political. Improvisation allows new ideas and it stimulates ideas, musically and socially as well. In Europe, political — very political — people are drawn to jazz. In Portugal, giant concerts are organized for us and the Left organizes them."

"Asked how he would define himself, Roach replied 'In the States, I would be called a socialist. I am just for monetary change so the masses get a big share of the wealth'."

With the passing of Max Roach we lose not merely almost the last link to the early days of bebop and a musical revolutionary, but also a revolutionary musician, not frightened to stand against oppression.



"Balanced communalism" in Lebanon

DAVID BRODER REVIEWS FAWWAZ TRABOULSI'S A HISTORY OF MODERN LEBANON (PLUTO PRESS)

BAPTISED its publisher as "the first comprehensive history of Lebanon in the modern period", Traboulsi's is a thorough account of almost 500 years of ethnic and religious conflict in the Middle Eastern state. However the author, a 1970s leader of the Organisation of Communist Action (OCA), obscures his own analysis and views in favour of a work which rarely amounts to anything more than dry chronology of events, dates and facts.

As a self-proclaimed Marxist, one might have thought that Traboulsi would take an interest in the long history of workers' struggle and labour movement activity in Lebanon. The book is however merely interspersed with occasional nuggets of information on this score — a page on what he calls the "nearly uninterrupted series of strikes and protest movements" from 1964-7, a paragraph on a seven-week student strike in 1968 and just a sentence or two on massive wildcat strikes in Mukallis-Tall al Za'tar organised by his own OCA party.

Much better covered are the activities of leftish movements and popular fronts such as the Lebanese National Movement (LNM), which included the OCA, Communist Party, Ba'athists, Nasserites, Amal and the Syrian

Social Nationalist Party.

Later substituted by the Lebanese National Resistance Front (LNRF), the LNM's programme was based on abolishing Lebanon's sectarian political structures, and the formation of some sort of bourgeois-democratic secular order. It is interesting to note that Traboulsi makes no real attempt to relate the history of the LNM, which attempted a coup in 1975, or even the Communists, to that of the labour movement or the working class. No doubt his assertion that the LNM merely aimed "to impose a new superstructure on the Lebanese oligarchy" through "simple democratic reforms within the context of the capitalist system" is accurate — but this is commented upon only matter-of-factly.

The whole work is coloured by abstractions and terminology which camouflages class distinction, such as the repeated reference to "progressives and leftists" and ill-defined "social movements". Throughout the author counterposes the fortunes of the free-market "merchant society" and strong oligarchy to the lot of "the poor" and peasants. Although worthwhile background information, this presents the oppressed as passive victims of political feuds going on above their heads, rather than posing questions about their own organisations and political allegiances.

Nevertheless, there is much of value to be found within the pages of Traboulsi's *History*. As a long-time fighter for secularism, the author does bring out effectively his central idea,

namely that Lebanon's sectarian political order, formalised in the National Pact of 1943, was itself at the heart of ethnic and religious conflict, rather than providing the intended balance between different groups. He explains the contradiction in a system which not only recognises all Lebanese people as "citizens" of an "independent state enjoying indivisible unity and integral sovereignty", but also pigeon-holes them into hierarchical religious communities, allocating parliamentary seats to each on a confessional basis according to quota.

The problem is not merely that these allocations could be deemed unfair to one religious group or another, the system assumes that there is some inherent commonality of interests of co-religionists. It aggravates sectarian divides by giving autonomy to each. It puts politics on the terrain of religion rather than individuals' political beliefs.

Indeed, Traboulsi comments that it was when the principle of religious communities' autonomy was played out in its purest form — sectarian militias controlling different districts and towns like fortresses, collecting taxes, and lordling it over their "own" populations during the civil war — that inter-communal tensions were most aggravated.

But again, Traboulsi has disappointingly little to say about a working-class riposte to sectarian politics. He refers in the chronology at the back of the book to trade union demonstrations against religious chauvinism on all sides during the civil war, but makes no mention in the text

itself. Instead the author lauds without criticism the "Ta'if agreement" which brought the Lebanese civil war to a close in 1990 — an accord which gave Muslims as many parliamentary seats as the Christians, while keeping the sectarian political order in place. Of course, such measures amount to little more than shifting around the proverbial furniture when the whole structure is rotten, but Traboulsi dignifies Ta'if with the character of a workable system. His history ends in 1990 with "peace".

This cut-off point seems particularly crude given that so much has happened to redefine the contours of Lebanese politics since, in particular the rise of the clerical fascist Hezbollah movement. The book is after all very new, and we are now living in 2007, a year after the summer war with Israel.

So what is Hezbollah's social base? Why is it so strong and the secular left so weak? Can it unite non-Muslims behind it in a "national cause" against Israel? Besides this sin of omission, Traboulsi seriously underplays Hezbollah's role in the civil war, which receives only the scantest of reference.

Overall therefore the work is of poor use as a guide to understanding Lebanon through the prism of its history. Besides the dense writing style "this happened and then this happened and then this happened..." and the sweeping coverage of hundreds of years of history in just 200 pages, Traboulsi has singularly failed to integrate his mass of empirical knowledge into any sort of analysis of religious sectarianism or its



Workers against imperialism: the May 4th movement

Workers in the Chinese revolution

The following article by Liz Millward tells the story behind the Chinese revolution of 1927, of how a working class developed in China, how its struggles interlaced with those of the nationalist bourgeoisie, how a young Chinese Communist Party mislaid those struggles and why, ultimately, they were defeated. It was first published in *Workers' Liberty* 12-13, August 1989.

At the beginning of the 20th century, China bore little relationship economically or politically to the countries of the west. The vast majority of the population were peasants — by the 1920s over 90% of the population still lived outside towns and only 6% lived in cities of over 50,000. The urban proletariat was tiny, largely concentrated in Shanghai, where 300,000 workers made up perhaps 20% of the workforce, although the proletariat in all of China formed only 0.5% of the population. Other concentrations of workers included 200,000 in Canton and Hong Kong, and 100,000 in and around Wuhan. About half the proletariat (44%) worked for foreign-controlled enterprises.

Until 1912 the country was governed by an Emperor, and a network of civil servants. In addition, with the exception of the new foreign industries, production and distribution was highly centralised, with vast public works (notably irrigation for agriculture) and food distribution in times of shortage. Peasants produced handicrafts with few industrially manufactured goods. Foreign intervention disrupted the balance of this economy by introducing cheap manufactured goods and upsetting central organisation.

Industry was largely foreign-owned and run from "concessions" policed by foreign powers in the big cities and sea-ports. China was being forced to trade at the point of a gun.

Foreign-imposed tariff laws did not permit China to build its own industrial base.

China became chaotic and divided, the vital public works fell into further disrepair, and local warlords ruthlessly exploited the peasantry who had now no form of redress. Sun Yat-sen ruled in South China, and various warlords in the north, with key cities (like Shanghai) under almost total foreign control.

China's enforced entry into World War One was on the orders of the allies, who wanted an excuse to seize German concessions and shipping in China. The attempt by the allies to hand these concessions over to Japan at the end of the war — to whom they were "given" by the great powers who signed the Versailles Treaty — sparked huge protests in 1919 — the so-called May 4th movement. Chen Tu-hsiu, a professor at Peking university, initiated a demonstration in Peking of 5,000 students. This spread to include over 100,000 people in 16 provinces. As a result, the Chinese government refused to sign the Versailles Treaty. The May 4th movement showed that nationalism was not just the prerogative of foreign-educated intellectuals like Chen and Sun, but had a real grip on the minds of ordinary people.

In addition to anti-imperialism, the intellectuals hated the warlords' militarism. The warlords were financially tied to foreign powers and also used the foreign-policed concessions as a place of retreat from the fighting on their home ground.

The imperialist powers had created a chaotic and divided China, and wanted to retain it in that condition. Different imperialists supported different warlords, using them to attack Sun Yat-sen. Sun appealed to America for help with his programme of democratic construction, but America, like the other powers, was interested in China mainly as a market. A

united China, especially one united under Sun's anti-imperialist, anti-militarist programme would lead to the expulsion of the foreign powers, and maybe the reclaiming of the territories seized by those powers (e.g. Hong Kong).

Western-style democracy under Sun Yat-sen failed under these conditions and he abandoned it even as an idea, re-organising his nationalist forces for a period of "tutelage" (in reality dictatorship) with the help of the only country who would answer his appeal, Russia. Far from wanting to extend Russia's exploitation of China, Lenin's government had pledged to return the territories occupied by the Tsars. Even though Sun Yat-sen did not favour communism for China, he agreed to negotiations with the Soviets.

The bourgeois nationalists

Out of the chaos of China's economic, political and social situation flowed a desire for change. The opposition movements were to divide into two main currents, both developed with the help of Russia and the Communist International. These currents were nationalism and communism. The nationalists, initially led by Sun Yat-sen and later Chiang Kai Shek, wanted to re-unify the country, to end the domination of the imperialist powers and to bring Western political structures to China.

By the late 1920s these ideas had simply deteriorated into the desire to unify China militarily, and democracy which had been tried very briefly had fallen victim to corruption and been abandoned.

The opium trade (forced on China by Britain in the 19th century), had drained the country of its wealth (silver), and China was forced to borrow heavily from the west to

finance further trade it did not want.

The lives of the peasant majority were not easy; a 1927 survey showing that more than half of all Chinese peasants were either partial or full tenants paying up to half or more of their produce as rent, or were agricultural labourers receiving irregular or minimal pay. Despite this, the landlords were subject to governmental control. Periodic peasant uprisings, which led to government investigations, prevented the worst excesses of the landlords, and centralised food distribution prevented the worst of the periodic famines.

No-one was allowed to prevent the exploitation and degradation of Chinese labour in the foreign-owned factories, and the profits from those industries went out of China, bringing no benefits to the Chinese. Between 1851 and 1855, the excess of imports over exports from China was over £175 million, and China was forced to borrow money to buy European iron and steel. In 1894 Japan tried to annex part of China but was stopped by Russia, France and Britain. Yet Japan was "given" a treaty port and "indemnities" of £34.5 million — China was then lent £48 million by British and European banks to pay this! The money had to be paid back out of taxes generated by the peasants, putting them under a huge burden.

For the Western ports, China was a market, its Manchu Emperors to be propped up or not, depending on the benefits to Western capitalism. Its economy (oriental despotism), previously balanced, if primitive, was in tatters, and its people exploited as cheap labour and taxpayers for European loans. Yet it was this exploitation, and the concentration of the workers in industry which was to sow the seeds of the coming revolution.

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The first revolution

THE Manchu dynasty collapsed in the late 19th century, to be replaced in 1912 by a republic under the (initial) leadership of Sun Yat-sen. Sun, like many of China's intellectuals, had been educated abroad. He wanted to bring China into the 20th century by adopting Western ideas and political structures. He was primarily a liberal, a democrat and a nationalist, seeing the foreign domination of China as the greatest evil. Sun was aided by Yuan Shih-K'ai, the former imperial commander-in-chief, who bargained with the republicans for the title of First President of the Republic. Since he was the real power, he got the title.

The parliament created by the republic was deeply corrupt, its members intent, above all else, on feathering their own nests. It did not take long for Yuan to show his true intentions — the attempt to found a new imperial dynasty with himself as Emperor. But Yuan, having broken with the republican constitution, could not maintain an empire. Other military men seized the chance to set themselves up in opposition, in different parts of China, supported by the various foreign powers under the principle of divide and rule.

In these conditions, a Communist Party was founded in 1921 by a small group of intellectuals led by Chen Tu-hsiu, the founder of the May 4th movement.

The original group of intellectuals expanded into a powerful workers' movement in a few short years. Its aims were to lead the national democratic revolution and to "organise the proletariat and to struggle for the establishment of the dictatorship of the workers and peasants, the abolition of private property, and the gradual attainment of a communist society". In addition, the CCP had a number of "objectives" including "the overthrow of military cliques, and the establishment of internal peace ... the removal of oppression by international imperialism and the complete independence of the Chinese nation [including self-determination of national minorities like Tibet] ... legislation for workers, peasants and women..." (from *Manifesto of Second National Congress*, July 1922).

So some of the aims of both groups were common to both nationalists and communists. Under the influence of the CI, common ground led to common work.

The future of post-revolutionary workers' Russia was inexorably tied to the overthrow of capitalism in Europe and America. Lenin and Trotsky insisted that to survive, the new Soviet Union needed revolution in the more advanced capitalist countries, and that such revolutions must be made by the workers of those countries. The Third International (Comintern) existed to help the revolutionary parties of those countries, and equally to guide the policies of the new workers' state.

The second congress of the International, held in Petrograd in 1920, turned to the colonial and semi-colonial countries primarily to further the spread of revolution in the West. Lenin said that countries like Britain would collapse if they were deprived of their markets in China, Africa and India, and that as long as capitalism could turn a super-profit in the colonies and semi-colonies abroad, it could afford to buy off the workers at home. Deprived of these markets, capitalism would inevitably turn on its native industries and, in fact, upon itself.

The first task of the proletarian parties in

colonial and semi-colonial countries was therefore to drive out the imperialists, and the *Theses of the Second Congress* on "The Colonial and National Question" deal with this issue. But the theses go further, looking at the prospects for socialist revolution in colonial countries, and the relationship between the proletariat, its parties, and the peasantry. The nationalist, anti-imperialist revolution is seen as broadly analogous to the bourgeois revolutions in Western democracies, and the role of the proletarian party is therefore similar — to work with the revolutionary nationalist forces, but to maintain class independence. Although the nationalists are revolutionary against imperialism, they will be counter-revolutionary against the workers, so the task of communists is to foster no illusions about the nationalists or the nationalist revolution, and not to subsume the communist parties in the nationalist struggle. Therefore, "the Communist International may enter into a temporary union with the bourgeois-democracy of colonies and backward countries, but not intermingle with it, and invariably preserve the independence of the proletarian movement even in its most primitive form."

The theses identified two main revolutionary groups — one, the peasantry and proletariat, who form the mass of the population but who have been suppressed — and, two, the educated middle class who express the latent "spirit of revolt." "Foreign domination has obstructed the free development of the social forces; therefore its overthrow is the first step towards a revolution in the colonies. So to help overthrow foreign rule in the colonies is not to endorse the nationalist aspirations of the native bourgeoisie, but to open the way to the smothered proletariat there."

So, "the foremost and necessary task is the formation of communist parties which will organise the peasants and workers and lead them to revolution... Such parties should co-operate with the bourgeois nationalist parties but always struggle against ... control and help to develop class consciousness amongst the working masses of the colonies."

"The revolution in the colonies is not going to be a communist revolution in its first stages. But if, from the outset, the leadership is in the hands of a communist vanguard, the revolutionary masses will not be led astray, but go ahead through the successive periods of development of revolutionary experience. Indeed, it will be extremely erroneous in many oriental countries to try to solve the agrarian problem according to pure communist principles. In its first stages, the revolution in the colonies must be carried on with a programme which will include many petit-bourgeois reform clauses, such as division of land, etc. But from this it does not follow that the leadership of the revolution will have to be surrendered to the bourgeois democrats. On the contrary, the proletarian parties must carry on vigorous and systematic propaganda of the soviet idea, and organise peasants' and workers' soviets as soon as possible. These soviets will work in co-operation with the soviet republics in the ultimate overthrow of the capitalist order throughout the world."

In fact the leadership of the revolution was surrendered to the bourgeois democrats. When Stalin came to power, the policy of co-operation and united front with 'independence' for the CP became an article of faith to be adhered to even though the objective conditions in China had changed. When the united front was

negotiated with Sun Yat-sen, on Sun's terms, it made sense. The CCP was a tiny force. But things changed, and changed quickly.

The founding of the CCP

THE CCP was founded officially in 1921 with the help and support of the Comintern. Discussions between CI representative Voitinsky and leading left activists and intellectuals began in 1920 in Peking when they met Chen Tu-hsiu, then producing *New Youth*, a Marxist journal. The political situation was in a state of flux, with anarchists and nationalists far more numerous than Marxists. Voitinsky proposed the formation of a communist party to organise the Marxists and increase Marxist propaganda and spread information about the Soviet revolution.

In May 1920, a provisional central committee was established, and in August of that year it was agreed to proceed to the formal organisation of a party, it was hoped within 12 months. The first tasks of the group were to build up organisation, and to make propaganda. A new journal, *The Communist*, was started, alongside journals for the labour, youth and women's movements. In addition, a Socialist Youth League was established by Chen Tu-hsiu and Chan T'ai-lei. Activity spread to the other major cities, with small groups being formed in Peking, Shanghai, Wuhan, Changsha, Canton and Tsinan, with a further group established in Paris in February 1921.

From the first, the communists oriented towards the working class (although Chen did have links with progressive Shanghai industrialists). In October 1920, the CCP organised its first industrial union, the Shanghai Mechanical Workers Union. In January 1921, the communists established a committee of the workers' movements in Shanghai, and began a workers' school. Similar initiatives were pursued everywhere the communists were organised, including the founding of the Hong Kong Chinese Seamen's Union, which was to launch the first really militant national strike 12 months later.

In all of this work the communists co-operated with other radicals and anarchists where their aims coincided, but already communist influence was far greater than their numbers indicated.

In 1921 the Communist Party was officially founded, organised as a Leninist party, having approximately 50 members — plus several hundred youth activists. It had a central

By the time it became clear how much the Chinese workers were capable of, Stalin was in control of the Communist International and was concerned only with defending "socialism in one country" — Russia.

committee of three, with Chen Tu-hsiu as general secretary. The first programme of the party called for the overthrow of capitalism and its replacement with the dictatorship of the proletariat and pledged the party to devote itself to labour organisation, propaganda and recruitment. This programme was to be filled out during the following year, and a more comprehensive, detailed strategy was adopted at the 1922 Congress. But the 1921 Congress did take a firm line on co-operation with Sun Yat-sen's nationalist party. In contrast to the policy of the united front which was to follow, the First Congress decided to criticise Sun, and remain independent of the nationalists.

Initial labour movement

In mid-1921 the party established a Labour Secretariat in Shanghai, with branches in Wuhan, Tsinan, Peking, Canton and Changsha. The Secretariat was influential in a number of strikes for better conditions, the first being the October 1921 strike against the British-American Tobacco Company in Shanghai. In January 1922, the Chinese Seamen's Union struck in Hong Kong. The union involved 10,000 workers. Other workers in Hong Kong and Canton supported the strike (as did Sun Yat-sen), as well as labour in Shanghai and elsewhere. By February some 100,000 workers were involved, virtually paralysing Hong Kong and forcing the British

to concede the right of the union to continue, and substantial wage increases.

The communists then initiated a national General Labour Union which held its first congress in Canton in May 1922. The congress claimed to represent about a fifth of China's workers, and advanced communist-inspired slogans for an 8-hour day, mutual aid and the overthrow of the imperialists and warlords. In the year following the Hong Kong-Canton Strike of 1922 the communists reportedly led 150,000 workers in more than 100 strikes.

The first wave of strikes climaxed in February 1923 with the crushing of the Peking Hanchow Railroad strike where the communists, attempting to deal with the warlord Wu P'ei-fu against another, Chang Tso-lin, organised railway workers into a national union, calling a conference in Chengchow on 1 February 1923. Wu felt the communists had outlived their usefulness and banned the meeting, causing a 10,000-strong protest strike. On 7 February, Wu's men fired on strikers up and down the railroad, killing at least 40, injuring more than 300 and then dismissed thousands from their jobs. It is likely that Wu was supported by the British in smashing the strike and the union, providing an object lesson for the young labour movement on the subject of alliances, and temporarily halting its development.

The communists were far more influential than their numbers would suggest. By mid-1922 only about 120 communists were in touch with the national organisation, although these were found in 16 provinces. Official party structures existed in at least 10 regions, and apart from work in the labour movement, these party organisations organised workers' schools, produced journals and attempted to organise young people, students and women. There were also attempts to organise amongst the peasantry. The party was organised along Leninist lines, being democratic centralist, and at the 1922 Congress adopted an organisational framework modelled on that of the Russian CP of 1919.

The 1922 Congress also advanced for the first time the idea of an alliance with the Kuomintang (KMT, also spelled Guomindang — Sun Yat-sen's party). This united front, in line with the CI theses, was to be around the common aims of struggling against militarism and imperialism. But the CCP was determined to be an equal partner with the KMT, to retain its independence, and continue its work with the labour movement, with the overthrow of capitalism as its ultimate goal. In fact, the united front was realised in a very different form, and against the spirit of the Second Congress, and against the views of leading communists like Chen.

In the early 20s it looked as if Sun Yat-sen had much more chance of ridding China of foreign powers than the communists did. So the Russian revolutionaries negotiated with Sun directly, offering him much-needed help. By the time it was to become clear how much the Chinese workers were capable of, Stalin was in control of the CI and was concerned only with defending "socialism in one country" — Russia.

The CI approached Sun Yat-sen for a united front between the CCP and the KMT in mid-1922. Sun refused, but, not wishing to lose the Russians' aid or his one potential ally in a hostile world, offered to let the communists join the KMT on an individual basis, submitting to his discipline. He also said that he saw no role for communism in China, and Maring, accepting all his terms on behalf of the CI, agreed with him. When Maring reported the negotiations to the Chinese communists, they were not so keen, and at a meeting of Chen and other leading communists in August 1922, the terms of the united front "from within" were rejected.

Eventually, the communists agreed to join the nationalists, watering down Sun's harshest conditions, and retaining the right to membership of their own party. But Maring had to threaten CI discipline before the decision to join the nationalists was agreed. The united front "from within" was thus a compromise — with the CCP able to maintain itself, and a limited amount of independence, but with the real power in Sun Yat-sen's Kuomintang to which the communists had now agreed to submit.

In fact, as time showed, the compromise was not really acceptable to either party, and it was to lead to political catastrophe when exposed to Stalin's insistence on "two stage" revolution, and his characterisation of the KMT as a "bloc of four classes", which would unite the people in the fight against imperialism. This characterisation, arrived at to justify the continuation of



Murdered Chinese communists, 1927



Chiang Kai-Shek with Roosevelt and Churchill, Cairo 1943

the united front on the KMT's terms, was rejected by the Chinese communists who saw clearly what the KMT was, and were afraid of losing both their independence and their ability to operate.

Trotsky opposed the united front from the beginning, although his opposition was not made public until much later. In 1927 he rubbished the idea of a "bloc of four classes". "...This by no means signifies that the imperialist yoke is a mechanical one, subjugating 'all' the classes of China in the 'same' way. The very powerful role of foreign capital in the life of China has caused very strong sections of the Chinese bourgeoisie, the bureaucracy and the military to join their destiny with that of imperialism..."

"It would further be profounder naivete to believe that an abyss lies between the so-called comprador bourgeoisie, that is, the economic and political agency of foreign capital in China, and the so-called national bourgeoisie. No, these two sections stand incomparably closer to each other than the bourgeoisie and the masses of workers and peasants.

"Installed within the Kuomintang and its leadership, the national bourgeoisie has been essentially an instrument of the compradors and imperialism..."

"It is a gross mistake to think that imperialism mechanically welds together all the classes of China from without ... The revolutionary struggle against imperialism does not weaken, but rather strengthens the political differentiation of the classes." (*The Chinese Revolution and the Theses of Comrade Stalin*).

Reorganisation of the KMT

ON 4 September 1922, Sun Yat-sen announced his intention to reorganise the KMT. The plans were agreed by January of the following year, drawn up with the help of Chen Tu-hsiu, and with input from the CI and Russia. The negotiations included Yoffe, Lenin's ambassador to China. In 1923 Sun began to build an independent nationalist army, sending Chiang Kai Shek to Russia to collect arms and study military organisation.

At the 3rd Congress of the CCP, held in June 1923, the party again debated its relationship with the KMT. Once more, Maring bore instructions from the CI to maintain the "bloc within", saying that the KMT should take the lead in the national revolution. There was considerable opposition from Chen and others to the bloc, but the CI's position was agreed, and included a statement that the CCP was to maintain its independence within the bloc.

In fact, as the communists were soon to learn to their cost, this "independence" was an illusion. Even though it was CP members who did lead the most radical workers' struggles, this was from within the KMT. The idea of CP independence "within" the KMT was used by conservative nationalists against the communists, and to agitate against the two parties having such a close alliance.

Despite misgivings (and open antagonism) from both sides, the KMT's first national congress in January 1924 included the communists. It reorganised the party along hierarchical lines, with the communists well represented at every level, particularly in the organisational and labour bureaux. The only place the communists were not able to penetrate was the KMT military council, or to obtain the senior roles in the military fields that they enjoyed in the political work of the KMT. At the Military Academy at Whampoa (established in 1924), communists and Young Socialists made up a large minority of recruits and graduates, but CCP leadership was on the political, rather than the military, side of the academy's work.

Within the KMT, the CCP organised itself into fractions, and were acknowledged to be the most energetic party workers and organisers. The CP attempted to manipulate the left of the KMT against the right, and so gain the leadership of key areas of party life. In this they were largely successful, but they did arouse opposition from KMT conservatives.

After Sun's death in 1925, the conservatives gradually increased their power behind the scenes, with disastrous consequences for the CCP. The CCP had difficulty retaining an independent class profile in, for example, labour work. The KMT wanted this directed primarily towards nationalist goals, the CCP were not prepared to mislead the working class into thinking that a united China would significantly improve their lot. Some KMT conservatives were landlords and factory owners — the communists' urge was to cut against these people.

Such contradictions abounded and fuelled antagonism between communists and conservatives. It was the class nature of the KMT which caused the contradictions. By 1924 the CCP was again ready to leave. Once again, pressure from the CI, and changes in the political situation kept the front alive. The working class began to recover from the May 7th massacre of railway workers, and to take strike action in Canton and Shanghai, and to build new unions. Cooperation in these activities between CCP and KMT buried their differences amongst the activists. The 4th CCP Congress (25 January) maintained the united front, but Chen criticised those communists who were too subservient to the KMT within it. At the same Congress, the CP (then numbering just under 1,000) decided to relax its membership conditions and attempt to turn itself into a mass proletarian party rather than a mainly intellectual group.

The events of 1925

BY the end of 1925 there were over 10,000 members of the CCP — a wave of powerful strikes swept through China, influenced by communists, new unions were set up and the brutal insensitivity of the imperialists won thousands of recruits to the nationalist and communist causes.

As the CCP relaxed its membership rules, the

newly radicalised workers could, and did, join in large numbers. The contradictions between communism and bourgeois nationalism were felt even more strongly, but Stalin's policy remained the same.

The return of workers' confidence was felt in Shanghai where strikes were held against the Japanese owners of the textile mills, and on the railways the National Railroad Union held its second congress in February 1925. The leaders of the powerful Chinese Seamen's Union joined the CCP. The National General Labour Union was formed by 166 unions in 1925, and held a congress in 1925 representing over half a million workers. The union was led by communists, who could now claim to influence a significant proportion of China's workers. By 1927 the CCP claimed to represent three million organised workers — the unions and other workers' organisations were growing, and as they grew they moved leftwards.

On 15 May 1925 a factory guard killed a striker in the Shanghai cotton mills (which had been on strike since February). This was not the

The time had come for the CCP to leave the united front and lead a revolution.

first such incident, and on May 28th the CCP central committee called for co-ordinated protest demonstrations on 30th May. As thousands of demonstrators met on Nanking Road, International Settlement Police, under a British officer, opened fire, killing 10 and wounding and arresting scores of others. The response was bigger demonstrations, culminating in a general strike on 1st June. A Shanghai General Labour Union was set up, under communist leadership.

The strikes and protests spread to other Chinese cities, climaxing in the Hong Kong-Canton strike and blockade. The strike was called by the NGLU, and a large supporting demonstration was fired on by British and French troops on 23rd June in Canton. Over 50 people were killed. This intensified the strike, involving those previously moderate and resulted in a boycott of Hong Kong which paralysed its trade. So as not to be forced to work, strikers left Hong Kong for Canton, effectively bringing it to a halt. The strike, supported by the sailors, lasted 16 months, the longest in China's history. Hardly a ship moved in or out of Hong Kong for over a year.

Again, the leaders of this tremendous revolutionary movement were communists. From being a small party composed largely of intellectuals, the CCP had increased its membership ten-fold, of which between half and two-thirds were workers.

Obviously, the May 30th movement did not just swell the ranks of the CCP, the nationalist movement benefited as well; merchants and

businessmen joined the protests. The CCP worked with these elements inside and outside the united front, but also used the time to tighten up and increase their own propaganda and educational work in the cities.

The communists targetted specific groups like women and youth, and began agitation amongst the peasants, forming peasant associations in several provinces. By 1927 the peasant associations claimed more than 9 million members in 16 provinces. Although much of the basic organisational work was done by communists in the early 1920s, the peasants were more than ready to take their place in the revolutionary struggle. Yet the pressure of the united front with the KMT was to cause the CCP to hold the peasants back from taking land, as it was to cause the communists to hold back strikes.

The situation in China had changed.

The workers' movement was strong, militant and led by communists. inevitably it would be held back if the alliance with the KMT was maintained. The workers' struggles had the power to pull sections of the bourgeoisie towards the left, and also to effectively close down imperialist enterprises in the big cities and ports. The CCP was no longer a couple of intellectuals, but a party rooted in the working class, with mass support. Even the peasants were starting to move, and move with, rather than against, the urban workers. The time had come for the communists to call for the oppressed masses to throw off all their oppressors — Chinese as well as foreign.

In other words, the time had come for the CCP to leave the united front and lead a revolution. As Trotsky put it, in September 1926: "The revolutionary struggle in China since 1925 has entered a new phase, which is characterised above all by the active intervention of broad layers of the proletariat, by strikes and the formation of trade unions. The peasants are unquestionably being drawn into motion to an increasing degree. At the same time, the commercial bourgeoisie, and the elements of the intelligentsia linked with it, are breaking off to the right, assuming a hostile attitude towards strikes, communists and the USSR."

"It is quite clear that in the light of these fundamental facts the question of revising relations between the CP and the KMT must necessarily be raised. The attempt to avoid such a revision by claiming that national-colonial oppression in China requires the permanent entry of the CP in the KMT cannot stand up under criticism."

"The leftward movement of the masses of Chinese workers is as certain a fact as the rightward movement of the Chinese bourgeoisie. [The] KMT ... must now be torn apart by the centrifugal tendencies of the class struggle. There are no magic political formulas or clever tactical devices to counter those trends, nor can there be..."

"...The CCP must now ... fight for direct independent leadership of the awakened working class."

Trotsky goes on to point out that it is the organised strength of the working class which will influence the petit-bourgeoisie, not manoeuvres within the KMT. The Stalinists, by contrast, felt that the time was not right for communism or soviets to be raised in China. They said that the CCP was not ready, and that the KMT must lead the nationalist revolution. In order to remain within the united front the CCP was to moderate its demands and its militancy. As Trotsky put it, "the desire ... [is] to convince the bourgeoisie and not to win the proletariat. This kind of position establishes the premises for inevitable retreats before the right, centre and pseudo-left leaders of the KMT." Events were to prove Trotsky right.

At the second congress of the KMT, the question of continuing the united front was again raised by the conservatives. But the left, headed by Wang Ching-wei and including (it seemed) Chiang Kai Shek, held the day.

Within the CP, many, including Chen, thought the time had come to leave the KMT, but Stalin's CI again prevailed. The CCP agreed to maintain the united front, working with the left and opposing the right, but to build their own organisation first in areas where the KMT was weak.

Chiang had other ideas. He began to talk of "deceit" from the communists, and on 20 March 1926 declared martial law. He used martial law to move against some Soviet advisers, placing them under house arrest, as well as 50 communists, alleging that they were involved in a plot against the KMT. Chiang

said that he did not want to disturb the alliance with Russia, merely take action against plotters, but he laid down limitations on the CP's further involvement in the KMT. These included limits on the number of communists on the KMT executive, a CCP membership list to be supplied to Chiang, no communist to have a leading KMT or government post, and no nationalist to join the CCP without permission. In addition, the ability of the CCP to act separately from the KMT was curtailed.

The coup against the CCP helped consolidate Chiang's own power and influence within the KMT. The only leader who might have stood against him, the "left" Wang Ching-wei, was having a "rest cure" in Europe. For the time being at least, Chiang was in control.

Chiang had, in fact, shown his colours, despite his later declaration that he was still friendly to the CI and the USSR. He maintained that he had simply wanted to stop certain Russians and CCPers and promised to restrict the nationalist right-wing as a balance. But, once again, the CI representatives (eg. Borodin) chose to stay with Chiang, urging the communists to keep their heads down and follow the nationalist lead.

Stalin's line had not changed, even though circumstances clearly had. The CCP, led by Chen Tu-hsiu, wanted to move to a "bloc without", but Stalin insisted on retaining the united front, while telling the CCP to bloc with the left and maintain their independence. Stalin blamed the CCP for failing to sufficiently build the KMT left, but forbade them to attempt to take over the party, urging instead that they build the left and attempt to turn the centre and right of the KMT against each other. At the same time, he warned them against alienating the bourgeoisie or petit-bourgeoisie as he said these elements could still be influenced by the left.

In fact, none of Stalin's instructions made any sense. There was no real left within the KMT, and the CCP were powerless to create one. The KMT was led by the armed right and centre, and the communists had been subordinated to it by Chiang's manoeuvrings and Stalin's treachery. Because of Moscow's insistence on the maintenance of the united front from within, and Chiang's terms for that, the CCP would do little to turn the mass movements of workers against Chiang — because that would mean turning them against the KMT. Stalin persisted in labelling Chiang a revolutionary and demanded that the CCP conciliate him.

It was obvious to most of the Chinese Communist Party leadership that Chiang's leftism was just a pose, but without breaking with Stalin, they could not fight Chiang, or fight for their own goals. Such "left" as existed within the KMT was around Wang, who had already shown his unwillingness to fight Chiang. When things got difficult he just left the political centres for Europe.

The Northern Expedition

THESE contradictions became even more obvious when the Northern Expedition (to unify China by armed force against the warlords) began in July 1926. To aid the expedition, the communists stepped up their agitation amongst the peasants along the army's route. The peasants were ready to seize the land, and to fight the landlords and the warlords who maintained them. But the policy of united front prevented the social revolution in the countryside. There were few demands about which the communists and nationalists could agree.

By 1927 the communists were forced to restrain the peasants, urging only seizure of lands from the biggest landlords; the small landlords and those landlords who were part of the KMT were left alone. By the end of 1926 the nationalists had only authorised the demand for a 25% cut in rents for the peasants, while Stalin was demanding that the communists should "restrain" the peasants, to avoid antagonising the nationalist generals (who were also landlords).

The same was true in the cities, with the labour movement. Armed labour pickets and strikes destabilised the warlords' economy to help the nationalist troops. These activities were organised by unions led by the communists. But as soon as a city fell under nationalist control, the strikes were forbidden and the pickets disarmed. To maintain the united front, the CCP had to help end strikes (like the Hong Kong-Canton strike, called off in October 1926, without major gains).

Yet at the same time as the social revolution

was being halted by Stalin's policy, Stalin himself was calling on the CCP to make use of the "revolutionary potential" of the "revolutionary nationalist" government. Stalin forbade the CCP to break the terms of the agreement with the KMT on land redistribution, while arguing that the KMT's policy of trying to buy off the urban petit-bourgeoisie by seizing the land of the big bourgeoisie and reducing rents would foster agrarian revolution.

The nationalists did not want social revolution, urban and rural, and the Chinese communists could see that perfectly well, but they were forced to maintain the united front, and at the same time try to stay true to the peasants and workers. It was an impossible situation. To maintain the united front the CP had only one course open to it — to restrain the revolution which they had helped create. Anything else risked a backlash from the KMT right, and the break-up of the united front.

In Shanghai the workers established a workers' government, which was in effective control of the city.

Shanghai (1927)

AS Chiang's armies approached Shanghai, the CCP-led Shanghai GLU began a series of strikes and protests against the warlords and imperialists who ran the city. In line with Stalin's confused policy, the CCP decided to attempt to take control of the city and hand it over to Chiang's nationalist forces.

With Chiang's troops 25 miles from Shanghai, the SGLU called a general strike, which paralysed the city. There was street fighting, and a bloody repression. The communists called off the strike on 24 February, but prepared for further action. Chiang's forces, which had stopped during the fighting, moved again on 21 March, and a second general strike was called, this time backed up by an armed rebellion.

The workers established a workers' government, which was in effective control of the city, raising demands for improved working conditions. At the same time, with Chiang's troops just outside Shanghai, in other parts of China leftists and union leaders were being repressed by the nationalists. Anti-communist purges took place in various central Chinese cities, and 19 communists were to be executed in Peking less than a month later.

When Chiang arrived in Shanghai on 26 March, he immediately set about preparations for an anti-communist coup. He set up a rival government and negotiated with reactionary forces for an armed showdown. The CI insisted on maintaining the united front, even though it was obvious that Chiang meant to break it decisively.

The communists were instructed to prepare for a coup, but not to provoke it, if necessary hiding their weapons. There was to be no withdrawal from the KMT. At the same time as the CP paper was warning of the dangers of nationalist repression, the workers were still applauding and welcoming Chiang. A small force of pickets was armed and trained, but instructed not to act. The CCP, and thus the workers' organisations, were effectively paralysed.

On 12th April, Chiang's Shanghai massacre began. The CCP organisation and the labour unions were crushed at a stroke, and hundreds of leading communists rounded up. Protest demonstrations were fired upon, killing several hundreds, and in other Chinese cities communists were rounded up and hundreds killed. Unions and labour organisations were outlawed, and many communist leaders were forced to flee the cities or go into hiding. In the space of a few days, thousands of leftists were killed or arrested, and the labour movement brutally crushed. Chiang declared a new national government in Nanking, in opposition to the government in Wuhan — also called a national government.

Chiang's troops, and the reactionary forces he had bargained with (like secret societies) spent days roaming the streets of Shanghai executing workers at random as a "warning" to others. Demonstrations were ineffective, labour was unarmed for the most part and had not been properly organised to fight back. Even though the communists had expected the

massacre since Chiang's troops had refused to enter the city and join in the battle to take power, they were unprepared to lead the workers against Chiang. The bloody repressions of communists and labour leaders just beginning in other parts of China had pointed to the same conclusion.

The Soviet and CI advisers agreed that Chiang would turn against organised labour in Shanghai. The only people surprised by the events in Shanghai were the workers who had, under communist leadership, welcomed Chiang to the city. Stalin, too, had the gall to evince surprise. A matter of days before the massacre began, the CI and Chiang had exchanged fraternal statements.

On 6th April (six days before the massacre began), Stalin said, of ending the united front: "Why drive away the right, when we have the majority and when the right listens to us? ... Chiang Kai Shek has perhaps no sympathy for the revolution, but he is leading the army and *cannot do otherwise but lead it against the imperialists.*" (My emphasis).

In fact Chiang kept his army away from the fight against the imperialists, hoping that the workers would be crushed. When the workers of Shanghai took power away from the imperialists, Chiang led his army against them. A month before, on 17th March, Chiang too went on record, saying: "I have never taken the view that I cannot co-operate with communists ... I have also made it clear that while I was opposed to oppression of the communists, *I would check their influence as soon as they grew too powerful.*" (My emphasis). While Chiang's reassurances are not worth the paper they are printed on, he does admit something Stalin would like to conceal, i.e. which side of the class struggle he was on.

Trotsky's attitude to the Shanghai coup was one of scorn towards the Stalinists in the CI and China. He all but begged the CCP to reject Stalin's analysis of the disaster, and criticised their policy, as always from the perspective of the irreconcilable class forces in China. While *Pravda* 'regretted' Chiang's coup and the bloodbath of Shanghai, Trotsky writes: "Ever more frequently one hears accusations at our party meetings against the 'ultra-left' Shanghaiers and in general against the Chinese workers for having provoked Chiang Kai Shek by their 'excesses'."

Stalin's attitude to the coup was firstly to avoid all mention of it, and secondly to shift the blame to anywhere except where it belonged.

Two weeks after the massacre, the CI held a meeting of its executive committee (27 April 1927). Roy reported from China, without once referring directly to Chiang's coup. "If Roy's abstract terms were translated into concrete reality, we would end up with: Chiang Kai Shek's anti-communist coup 'has strengthened the bonds between the KMT's left wing and the CCP'. Thus the 'bloc of 4 classes' remained; it merely became necessary to get rid of that part of the big bourgeoisie represented by Chiang Kai Shek. The policy of 'KMT-CCP collaboration' remained; it was only necessary to get rid of the 'KMT right-wing' which Chiang represented, and replace it with the 'KMT left-wing' led by Wang Ching-wei. This, then was the direction given to the 5th Congress of the CCP by the CP representative." (Peng Shu-tse introduction to *Trotsky on China*).

Put at its simplest, Stalin excommunicated Chiang from the KMT-CCP bloc and declared Wang and his Wuhan "national government" the new revolutionary leaders. Thus the policy before and after Chiang's coup was identical — Chiang's connection with the KMT was ignored, and Wang became its leader. All of this, of course, took place completely outside reality. Chiang and Wang were in the same party, Wang consistently avoided showdowns with the KMT conservatives, even at the time of the coup, and there was no evidence at all that, as Stalin said, "the revolutionary KMT in Wuhan, by a determined fight against militarism and imperialism, will in fact be converted into an organ of the revolutionary-democratic dictatorship of the peasantry."

These are precisely the things Stalin was saying about Chiang not two months before, when Chiang too was masquerading as a left-winger. In exactly the same way that Chiang had been declared leader of the revolution, Stalin now named Wang. In exactly the same way the CCP was to fall in behind the new, better, more left-wing KMT. The same rules applied: no agrarian revolution, no anti-KMT agitation, no "excesses", no "provocation". Two CCP members joined the "revolutionary government" in Wuhan as ministers of labour and agriculture. Far from pulling the government to the left, they were in fact used to hold

back the revolution. Once again, the revolutionary movements were paralysed, once again the workers and peasants had no independent voice, no independent party fighting for their interests.

As Trotsky put it at the CI meeting: "...Stalin assumes, and wants the International to assume, the responsibility for the policy of the KMT and the Wuhan government, as he repeatedly assumed the responsibility for the policy of the former 'national government' of Chiang Kai Shek (particularly in his speech of April 5, the stenogram of which has, of course, been kept hidden from the International). We have nothing in common with this policy. We do not want to assume even a shadow of responsibility for the policy of the Wuhan government, and the leadership of the KMT, and we urgently advise the CI to reject this responsibility ... Politicians of the Wang Ching-wei type, under difficult conditions will unite 10 times with Chiang Kai-Shek against the workers and peasants."

Which, of course, is exactly what happened less than two months later, with more slaughter of workers, peasants and communists. Trotsky's demand was for the CP to call for soviets to pull over KMT troops and unite against the reactionary generals, landlords and imperialists. Trotsky urged the revolutionary masses to leave the KMT and to have no confidence in it — but rather to fight in their own name, and to crush those compromisers who stood in their way. "*The Chinese bourgeois-democratic revolution will go forward and be victorious either in the soviet form or not at all.*" (Second speech on the Chinese Question, 24 May 1927, emphasis in original).

Tragically, far from being heeded, Trotsky was hounded and ridiculed by the Stalinist CI. When Wang crushed the labour movement and massacred a peasant army in and around Wuhan and expelled and arrested communists from the KMT (the "July 15th expulsion") Stalin reacted predictably. He should have admitted that Trotsky had been right all along. Instead he moved further into the realms of fantasy and declared that, far from being defeated, the revolution had moved onto a "higher plane".

Trotsky stated that the revolution had been defeated, that the labour movement, the trade unions and the CCP had been smashed. In saying this he was stating bald facts — facts concealed as so many others had been by Stalin. Trotsky pointed out that China would now face a period of reaction and counter-revolution, but for Stalin the time had come for the CCP to declare itself, leave the KMT (they had been expelled anyway!) and organise armed uprisings.

These uprisings were no more than adventures to conceal Stalin's disastrous line. These uprisings were doomed to failure — and they failed. In Nanchang in August 1927 those armed revolutionaries still alive after the previous defeat were largely destroyed. The same happened in the 'Hunan-Hupeh Harvest uprisings', the Haifung soviet movement and finally in the Canton Insurrection of December. In Canton alone almost 6,000 people were killed.

If there had been any potential for the CCP to go underground, maintain contact with the workers and peasants and start to rebuild, Stalin's uprisings had destroyed it. The revolution had been defeated in April, Stalin's adventurism finally killed it, ensuring that few communist cadres were left to fight again. The Chinese Communist Party, thanks to Stalin, had missed its opportunities, confused and misled the workers and peasants and finally destroyed itself.

"Bolshevik policy is characterised not only by its revolutionary scope, but also by its political realism ... The greatest task is to know how to recognise in time a revolutionary situation and to exploit it to the end. But it is no less important to understand when this situation is exhausted and converted, from the political point of view, into its antithesis. Nothing is more fruitless and worthless than to show one's fist after the battle..." (Leon Trotsky, *The Chinese Question after the 6th Congress*, 4 October 1928).

Stalin fails on both counts. "Having subordinated the Chinese workers to the bourgeoisie, put the brakes on the agrarian movement, supported the reactionary generals, prevented the appearance of soviets and liquidated those that did appear..." Stalin then blamed the whole mess on Chen Tu-hsiu, and expelled him from the party he had founded. Stalin was truly "the gravedigger of the second Chinese revolution." (Trotsky, *Stalin and the Chinese Revolution*, 26 August 1930).

INSIDE THE STUDENT MOVEMENT

Student socialists plan for new term

BY SOFIE BUCKLAND, NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS EXECUTIVE (PC)

It is, unfortunately, a cliched way to begin an article about left-wing youth, but students and young people in and around the AWL will be very busy this term.

Our comrades will be intervening in freshers' fairs and organising meetings at universities and colleges around the country. We want to be a pole of attraction for students attracted to revolutionary socialism but put off by the classless "anti-imperialism" of the SWP, say, or the bland opportunism of the Socialist Party.

What marks out Workers' Liberty meetings, like our publications, is our commitment to serious discussion and debate. You may disagree with us, but you won't be bored. If you'd like to organise a meeting with a Workers' Liberty speaker or materials on your campus, get in touch.

In addition, we will be contributing to a number of initiatives which we'd urge students and young people interested in socialism to get involved with.

Firstly, we are supporting the second Feminist Fightback conference, which takes place at the University of East London on 20 October. Workers' Liberty women, mainly students, helped launch the first Feminist Fightback last October, and have been actively involved this time too. That reflects a year of frenzied socialist feminist activity, including participation in the Fightback abortion rights demonstration in March, a dayschool on women's liberation in April, the creation of a monthly discussion group in London and the launch of our publication Women's Fightback.

Every indication is that Feminist Fightback will be a brilliant event - come along.

We will also be continuing our work within Education Not for Sale, which since its launch in September 2005, has provided a principled and, for its size, effective opposition to the right-wing leadership of NUS.

Not content with refusing to organise a serious fight against top-up fees and slashing the

national union's democratic structures, the NUS leadership are now preparing a new set of attacks on student democracy, probably including abolition of the "Block of 12" section of the national executive — the only body through which grassroots representatives and the left can exercise any day-to-day control over the top bureaucrats and committees. Just as Gordon Brown is seeking to destroy what remains of Labour Party democracy, his acolytes in the student movement are seeking to hack up the few avenues through which rank-and-file students can be actively involved in their union.

As well as seeking to be central to the fight back on NUS democracy, ENS will be continuing its campaigning over issues like fees, grants and the minimum wage. If NUS won't fight on these issues, then activists need to get organised to do so.

As part of this, following its successful activist gatherings in September 2005 and May 2006, ENS will be holding another conference at the UEL on 21 October (the day after Feminist Fightback). The focus will be on education for liberation, on ideas about what's wrong with our education system and how we can win an education, and society, that are truly democratic, participatory, egalitarian and sustainable.

At the next Workers' Liberty student and youth fraction meeting, on 25 November, we hope to further develop plans for our involvement in anti-sweatshop and workers' rights campaigning, including next year's Student Anti-Sweatshop Week of Action and the idea of a tour with an activist from the "Supersize My Pay" campaign in New Zealand.

So there's a lot to do. If you'd like to help us with it all, or find out more about ideas, get in touch!

• For more about AWL youth and students, email Sofie at volsunga@gmail.com

• **Education Not for Sale:**
www.free-education.org.uk

• **ENS's briefing on NUS democracy:**
www.free-education.org.uk/?p=385

• **Feminist Fightback:**
www.feministfightback.org.uk

NO BORDERS

Deportations to Iraq continue

The International Federation of Iraqi Refugees has issued the following appeal.

THE UK government is currently arresting and detaining Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers. The UK Government has forcibly deported 89 Iraqi Kurdish asylum seekers on four different occasions over the last three years. The first three forcible deportations were carried out by military aircraft from Brize Norton, a military airbase near Oxford. The last deportation was by a so-called humanitarian plane from London on 5 September 2007. The International Federation of Iraqi Refugees fears more deportations are planned back to Iraqi Kurdistan, given the increasing numbers of Iraqi Kurds being arrested and held in detention centers all over the UK.

The International Federation of Iraqi Refugees believes that the deportations could not be happening at a worse time with the recent cholera outbreak affecting Sulaimaniya, Arbil and Kirkuk, in which more than 2000 people have been infected so far. The International Federation of Refugees continues to contest the idea that Northern Kurdistan is a safe place to return Iraqi asylum seekers.

The situation in Kurdistan may be relatively stable compared to other parts of Iraq, but Iraqi Kurdistan is not an independent state and

continues to be subject to the outcomes of the policies of the US and occupying forces whilst the Iraq war continues. The two ruling parties in Kurdistan, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) are authoritarian and undemocratic. Many people are unemployed in Kurdistan and public services are very poor. The Kurdish authorities continue to persecute human rights campaigners and journalists. Terrorist groups and Islamic parties are intimidating Kurdish people on a daily basis.

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and US State Departments reports all indicate violations of human rights in Iraqi Kurdistan. The KDP and PUK are not able to protect Kurdish people and provide public services and utilities. All of the factors above lead to the continuing flow of refugees leaving Iraqi Kurdistan.

The International Federation of Iraqi Refugees asks all human rights and refugee rights organizations and trade union branches to send letters to the Home Office condemning the UK's Government's continuing policy of deporting Iraqi refugees back to Kurdistan. Please send a copy of all letters sent to International Federation of Iraqi Refugees.

• Home office fax: 02070354745

Feminists Against Borders

Feminists Against Borders will hold their first meeting, "Moving gender", as part of the Gatwick No Borders Camp, Friday 21 September, 10am-1pm, Ruskin House, 23 Coombe Road, Croydon.

The meeting will be an open discussion on the relationship between national borders, gender and sexuality. From their statement:

"Every day of our lives we are confronted with rigid ideas of gender and sexuality and thus our 'appropriate' roles in society. Anyone who does not conform is seen as 'other' or 'strange' or even 'dangerous'. In a society that always attempts to mark someone as 'other' (by race/sexuality/gender or any other means) we refuse to accept this present condition of nations and borders, the containment of people behind false divides that serves only to profit those in power.

"Many Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Trans and queer people find themselves crossing varying kinds of borders constantly.... Rigid gender roles and enforced norms mean many queers spend their lives migrating in one way or another.

"In similar and at the same time different

ways, women are constantly moving. In and out of paid work, inside and outside of male dominated spaces, and across borders. Migration, so the media, politicians, mainstream feminists and leftists, and commentators tell us is a dangerous activity. Yet, women move and do so for the same reasons as everyone else. They/we move to make money, to survive and to realise their projects, dreams, and relationships.

Some ideas for discussion:

• What alternative political practices and discourses can we create that would actually support the struggles of migrant women, trans and queer people, whether they are employed in the sex industry, in domestic work, or in any other industry?

• What can we do to create alliances with other struggles (and their existing networks) across Europe?

• What kind of alliances do we need to create in order to shift the terms of this debate, in particular in feminist politics and in the left, and in order to fight the stigmatisation we experience in the wider society?"

AWL LONDON FORUM: 60 YEARS SINCE INDIAN INDEPENDENCE

**Speakers: Workers' Liberty,
South Asia Solidarity Group**

20 September 2007 - 7:30pm

**Calthorpe Arms, Grays Inn Road,
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More : workersliberty.org/node/9077

1857/2007: IMPERIALISM, 'RACE', RESISTANCE

**An international conference on the
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**Organised by South Asia Solidarity
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**To register or for more info email
sasg@southasiasolidarity.org**

WHERE WE STAND

TODAY one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class, which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The **Alliance for Workers' Liberty** aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present system, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social

partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We are also active among students and in many campaigns and alliances.

WE STAND FOR:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights — to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.

• A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.

- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital — workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society, from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate.

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell — and join us!



workers' liberty & Solidarity

Labour Party Conference

Brown's plan is a death blow



**Will Brown
end
political
input of
unions?
See page 3**

*Picture: Brown and "union
man" Alan Johnson*

Iraq unions unite to fight oil privatisation

BY MARTIN THOMAS

TWO of Iraq's major union federations have formed a united front to fight against oil privatisation and the government's attempt to outlaw the oil unions.

On 8 September the Iraqi Federation of Oil Unions and the Federation of Workers' Councils and Unions held a launch conference in Basra (centre of the southern Iraqi oil industry) for their united front. They plan to organise a joint demonstration on 24 September. IFOU president Hassan Jumaa said that his union will shut down the oil pipelines if the parliament passes the privatisation law.

Iraq's other main union organisation, the General Federation of Iraqi Workers, has also come out against oil privatisation and the government's anti-union moves.

The Iraqi government of Nouri al-Maliki, under US pressure, has been labouring for months to pass an oil privatisation law. The hitch is not so much the principle of privatisation, which the main parties in Iraq's parliament accept, as the distribution of power to negotiate contracts, and to receive revenue, between Baghdad and the regions.

At the start of September, a conference in Dubai was reported to have produced agreement on a draft privatisation law. Now it is not clear. According to oil expert Ben Lando, "neither the Kurds nor the central government can agree on changes each side wants or has made": their chances of reaching agreement are diminished by the fact that "the Iraqi government is becoming weaker every day" and it is hard to get enough members to turn up for sittings of parliament.

But the Kurdistan regional government has already signed deals with foreign companies, and now Hussain al-Shahristani, oil minister in the Baghdad government, says: "If for any political reason the law is delayed, we'll go ahead and start discussions with international oil companies".

In July Shahristani issued instructions to oil industry bosses not to deal with the oil unions. He cited the 1987 decree from Saddam Hussein's era, banning unions in the public sector (the bulk of Iraq's economy). Despite repeated demands from the new unions, that law has never been repealed under the US/UK occupation.

Pretty much all Iraqi unions therefore live in semi-legality, a situation compounded by the Iraqi government's Decree 8750, from August 2005, which nominally confiscates all union funds and puts them under the control of the ministry of labour.

At present central government in Iraq is too weak to enforce such decrees thoroughly, but they remain on the books, to be enforced as and when the government feels strong enough.

On Sunday 2 September, British troops withdrew from their base in the centre of Basra to their remaining outpost at Basra airport. The move is part of a process in which British troops have already, nominally, handed over three of the four provinces they were occupying to Iraqi authorities.

Since the British troops generally kept off the streets as much as they could anyway, and reserve the option of intervening again whenever they see fit, the nominal "handovers" do not make much difference on the ground. For the unions in Basra — facing local authorities divided, sometimes to the point of armed conflict, between the three Islamist movements SCIRI, Fadhila, and Mahdi Army — things will not be easier.

AusIraq, in Australia, has initiated an international petition to support the Iraqi oil unions under attack. You can download a copy, for use in seeking signatures in your workplace or union, from the Iraq Union Solidarity website

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